NATURE'S MERRY-GO-ROUND

A LOG BOOK OF THE SEASONS

BY

MARCUS WOODWARD

With Best wishes
for a very Happy Xmas
from
Auntie Jamma
to
Elizabeth. 1946.

NATURE'S MERRY-GO-ROUND

Books by Marcus Woodward

IN NATURE'S WAYS

THE GUIDE NATURE BOOK

CAMP FIRE NATURE YARNS

And in collaboration with
Owen Jones

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NATURE'S MERRY-GO-ROUND

A Log-Book of the Seasons

By

MARCUS WOODWARD

WITH 49 ILLUSTRATED CALENDARS FOR THE MONTHS
BY
FREDA I. NOBLE

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TO

U N A

to whom all the best passages in this book—her own yarns—
are due ; who tames Robins wherever she goes, and some-
times Hedge-Sparrows and Jackdaws, and educates
and enchants all sorts of other creatures,
from sleepy Dormice to bloodthirsty
Weasels, wild Wolf Cubs of
Sussex, and at least one
Author.

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PREFACE

I HAVE founded a new society, the Order of the Little Owls. The title is, I think, happy, as *Athene noctua*, the Little Owl of our woods and fields is—who shall doubt ? —the Owl of Wisdom, the very bird of Athens whose image is stamped on Attic coins. Ever alert, it flies by day as by night. Nobody knows about this new society yet, and its members will be unaware that I have elected them until this book is published. They number some thousands, but the roll has not yet been made out. Still, I hope that members will soon receive the badge of the Order, and take the pledge, which will be somewhat to this effect, " I love Wild Life, I rejoice in the Great Outdoors, it shall be my constant habit and pleasure to study and reverence Nature, and whenever I go into field or wood, I promise to stand and stare."

" Stand and Stare " is our motto :

> A poor life this if full of care
> We have no time to stand and stare.

Though the Order of the Little Owls is yet somewhat nebulous, its Log-Book exists. This is a noble folio volume, bound in what looks like vellum, and was presented by a bank manager, which accounts for a label it bears, " Cash Register." The longitudinal rulings come in handily for noting dates, and will be useful too for the record of the issue of gold badges in due time. Enormous clasps were a present from an art worker skilled in enamelling. The writing has been done with a goose-quill, and, I fear, is shocking ;

but the matter is pure gold, and the spirit of the whole is as lively as that of *Athene noctua* himself.

The entries have been contributed by all sorts and conditions of naturalists, wise men and women, boys and girls, in every walk of life.

. . . . . .

In a discourse by Sir Henry Wotton, a Provost of Eton College about 1624, is a passage upon what he called " the Blessing and Benefit of Seeing," by which blessing, said he, we do not only discover Nature's secrets, but with a continued content, for the eye is never wearied of seeing. " Nay," he went on, after speaking of our joy in looking upward to things celestial, " if the eye look but downward it may rejoice to behold the bosom of the earth, our common mother, embroidered and adorned with numberless and various flowers."

This Blessing and Benefit of Seeing is the very gospel of Woodcraft which our Log-Book proclaims. It is a record of things seen, little and large. One wrote in our Log :

" A pair of Ducks were courting on a pond on a bitterly cold day in December. The Mallard, during the half-hour in which I stood and stared at them, never ceased bobbing and bowing to his enchanter, cutting so gallant a figure as to be a pattern to all true lovers."

A little thing to remember—to remember for years !

(It brings to mind William Allingham's miniature :

Four ducks on a pond,
A grass bank beyond,
A blue sky of spring,
White clouds on the wing—
What a little thing
To remember for years—
To remember with tears.)

In our Log will be found, I hope, the very yarns to make young eyes appreciate the Blessing and Benefit of Seeing—

to set young folk longing to be out on the trail, watching and listening and, unseen and unheard, seeing and hearing —beholding the Light, whence it flows, and seeing it in their joy. They will not think of how soon their eyes will grow dim, and they may not have read that it is the boy, as the poet sings (including the girl, no doubt), who

> Still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the Vision Splendid
> Is on the way attended.

Our Log is not without its unconscious humour, and there are notes with morals which escaped the writer, as in this entry :

" Walking along the road we found some wild Succory growing in profusion ; we could not make a bouquet of the flowers as they had no stalks, but we picked one or two, *and they closed up !* "

The moral—not to pick wild flowers—whether or not they close up in resentment—was often pressed home in our Log.

This happy thought about the flower, Love-in-a-Mist, somehow crept into the Log, from a very young contributor :

" How this fragile, pretty flower earned its name I don't know, but when one looks at it closely it certainly does remind one of love in a mist ! "

And—somehow—I think it really does !

One other gem—it put me in the best of tempers for a week :

" Saw a number of birds pecking a little one because it wouldn't mate ! "

I now proceed to the pleasant task of copying out a selection of yarns from the Log of the Little Owls.

(Lest there should be any doubt of their genuine nature, I would add that many of my own Nature-notes in this book, and all the yarns here related, were printed originally under

the contributors' names or initials in the pages of the two official organs of the Guide Association, *The Guide*, and *The Guider*, thence were transferred, if not by goose-quill, by scissors and paste, to the Log-Book—for which the art-worker above-mentioned has promised to provide a richly enamelled binding. I must express my gratitude to the Editors of those papers for their kindness in giving me permission to weave the stories into this book.)

MARCUS WOODWARD.

Nature's Merry-go-Round

CHAPTER I

THE SNOW MOON

Ask the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea and they shall declare to thee.

JOB.

THE first note we entered in our new Birch-Bark Roll or Nature Log-Book reads thus:

"*New Year's Day*. Wild Violet found by a Cornish stone hedge."

That was a froward Violet! Where was its famed modesty, of which the spring poets never tire of singing?—finding the just emblem of a demure maid in the "Violet by the mossy stone, half-hidden from the eye." Still, the Cornish Violet looked forth with good effect in giving our Log-Book its start.

The next note is more typical of New Year's Day: "Robin sang."

He had sung the requiem of the dying year on New Year's Eve, and he sang the first song to ring up the New Year's curtain. But then he had been singing since the August before, as the Song-Thrush had been singing since September whenever the day inspired a song. A Sky-Lark had soared and sung on Christmas Day. Often through the

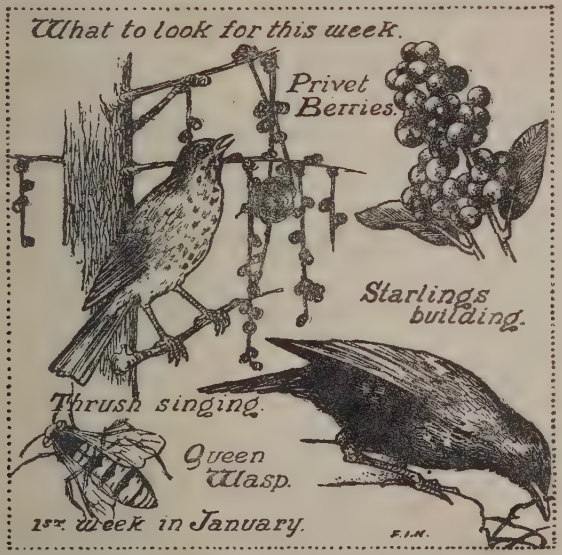
Winter the Wren had obliged us with a rollicking stave, like a peal of happy laughter, as though it were beyond question that we should all be as happy as kings. And the demure little Hedge-Sparrow—whose song was also noted in our Roll on New Year's Day—had been singing the same tune as the Wren on and off through the Winter, though not with the same trills and merriment. And down in Cornwall the stream-haunting Dipper had been singing a winter song, and we had a note in our Log of a Dipper making music while it drifted down a stream on a platform of floating ice.

The songs we long most to hear with the New Year are those which have not been heard before in Winter, the true herald songs of better days, like those of Mistle-Thrush, Titmice and Chaffinch. The Mistle-Thrush is Spring's own trumpeter. Its song-season is a short one, compared to that of its cousin, the Song-Thrush, and we miss its voice in the spring choir about the time when the Nightingale opens the "song of songs." On New Year's Day our Log contained this entry :

"Coal-Titmouse sang 'che-chee, che-chee'—as if demanding more and ever more cheese—in a conservatory."

Perhaps it was deceived by the warmth in thinking that Spring really had come. A day or two later the Great Titmouse's "sawing" notes were heard, like the sound of one of its names, Ox-eye, or like the sound of a file on a saw. The Blue Titmouse soon joins the January choir, and the Marsh-Titmouse is heard crying "If-he, if-he!" Among the most welcome of all these first true songs of the New Year is the short, ringing, homely hymn of the Chaffinch. "Tol-de-rol, lol-chick, wee-eedo" it sings, or, as the children say, "Sweet, sweet—bring my pretty love to meet me here." The song proclaims the character of the bird which has found a place in a proverb, "As gay as a Chaffinch."

The New Year's Day yielded one note which we treasured more than many others: "Saw a Brimstone butterfly." It seemed like a blessing on the New Year and on our new Birch-Bark Roll that it should have chosen that day to awake from winter sleep, and look for the sun and the Spring on its primrose wings, and it carried a message to us all to



awake from winter discontent, and follow to the coppices where the white Violets in a little time will be blowing.

A Queen Wasp also was seen—another courier from the Court of the Sleeping Beauty.

Gnats were seen, dancing an up-and-down dance by a sheltered hedgerow.

Rooks were noted, inspecting their last year's nests.

Besides one Violet, we found a few Primroses. Christmas Roses and Yellow Jasmine bloomed in our gardens. In the fields we found Groundsel, Chickweed, and some other

humble weeds, which do good service in feeding the birds with their seeds. In the woods, Honeysuckle showed new green leaves, surely always the first new leaves of a year.

Late in the evening a final note for New Year's Day was inscribed by our goose-quill:

"The sharp staccato bark of a dog Fox was heard in the 'Wilderness,' and was answered by a blood-curdling screech from a Vixen."

Foxes begin courting with the New Year: that bark and that screech were true love-songs.

The decorator of our Birch-Bark Roll made pictures of some of our records, as of a Starling which in the first week of the year made pretence to be building a nest. This example was followed by a House-Sparrow. It spent a long time one day in playing with a few feathers which it carried to a Martin's nest under a house-eave, but we could not be sure whether it was adding an eider-down to its winter dormitory, or making a new cradle. And that House-Sparrow sang; at least, according to its own ideas, making a chattering, twittering, churring noise, uttered with such energy that we could see the throat vibrating. Also a Jackdaw was seen flying with a twig in its beak, though early May is time enough for Jackdaws' eggs to be hatching.

On the first sunny day of January the Hive-Bees come forth, though honey and bee-bread (the pollen of flowers) must be hard to find. The object of their quest would seem to be dew-drops.

And Snails appear, to the satisfaction of the Song-Thrushes and Blackbirds, which enjoy nothing better than Snails for whetting their whistles.

One snowy day yielded this curiosity of a note:

"Deep snow in Essex. Church bells heard ringing from a village four miles distant."

I know an old shepherd of the South Downs who once heard his sheep-bells ringing at a range of four miles. He

was "sartin sure" they were not merely ringing, as I suggested, in his head, and this in spite of the fact that he frankly confessed, "I generally-always do hear my sheep-bells a-ringing when I am asleep."

Here follow a few records from our Roll which made days red-lettered :

A great congregation of Fieldfares was heard whistling in unison in a group of trees, making what is called "a charm."

A party of Greenfinches feeding on Sweet Brier Hips, made, in their green and olive-slashed coats, an attractive contrast to the scarlet berries.

Hedge-Parsley, with fern-like leaves, shows bravely in hedgerows ; Elder-leaves appear ; Wild Arums are unfurling

their leaves ; Dandelion flowers ; Lesser Celandine flowers ; Gorse is a-flame on Cornish cliffs ; female (red) flowers appear on Hazel-twigs, while the male catkins are shaking loose and scattering their pollen ; Chestnut-buds are becoming very sticky, and visibly swelling.

Wood-Pigeons start crooning.

A Spider was seen, mending her web.

A Pipistrelle Bat was seen on the wing in broad daylight.

Red Squirrels were observed in "the Wilderness," scratching as if to try to find a buried hoard of nuts. A woodman said they have young in January.

The Robin that Did

That Robin Redbreast—" household bird with the red stomacher," as the poet Daddy Wordsworth would call him —which opened the New Year with a hymn of praise, is the hero of many yarns in our Log. We had another note about him on New Year's Day. His winter haunt is a little paved garden, with a tiny lily-pond. A sheet of ice had formed on this water ; and when we were feeding Bobbie, we threw a bit of crust across the ice. He darted in chase, and, to his immense surprise—judging by his expression—made a beautiful slide, which any schoolboy might have envied. As he shot across the pond, he reminded us forcibly of a picture of Mr. Pickwick on the ice.

The Robin is the best-loved of all British birds, because he is so fearless and so friendly—among other reasons. In character, he is domineering. His favourite pitch in the garden he regards as his own little kingdom. Here he lives solitary in Winter ; and woe betide any other Robin which dare intrude—even his mate. He summons the gardener's real owner as he wishes, and sometimes almost owns him too. Master of the bird-table in Winter, in the Summer he claims the choicest grubs as turned over by the spade. He has

the instinct of a ruler, he scents the joy of power. And he is very jealous, and like humans with this failing, his jealousy sometimes boils over—and then murder is done.

Here is a story to the point from our Log: it has the curious title, "The Robin that Did!"

A household Robin had been nursed through an injury

to its slender little legs, and became a great friend of a family. Every morning he would enter the breakfast-room like a welcome guest, and help himself to the butter—all Robins revel in butter—and then to the loaf, and then to anything he fancied. After breakfast he would take his bath in a dish of water set on the floor, or perhaps on the table. For the rest of the day he would follow his friends about the house. In Winter he would spend his entire day indoors, except for

an occasional flight out of one window and in at another. Yet, strange to relate, he always insisted on roosting out-of-doors.

In Spring he disappeared to seek out his mate, who, like an Eastern lady, was kept in strictest "purdah." In the Summer he was rarely seen, and if met, would give his friends the curtest salutation—one sidelong glance, and no more. But in Autumn he came home, somewhat bedraggled-looking, after moulting, and then he would behave as if he had never been away.

One year he nested in a greenhouse, between two stones, with a maidenhair-fern for a canopy.

"I was allowed to feed his babies," relates one of his human friends, "handing one mealworm round apiece, but I did not risk this often, in case I made them ill.

"One day I offered, on my hand, six mealworms, fat and golden, to see what Bobbie would do. I saw his bill water! He seemed to lick his lips; but one by one he took the mealworms to the baby birds. The fifth went to the sitting hen, and then he ate the sixth himself!

"I have told of all his charm, his courage, and his gallantry—would that was all! But here you have the bird of power and personality.

"One winter day I noticed a little Hedge-Sparrow, a dainty, demure and modest bird, feeding among my Pigeons. I paid him some attention, coaxing him with hemp until one morning, while I knelt upon the lawn, he actually came up and fed out of my hand.

"Alas! my selfish pleasure caused his death.

"Swift as a flash, the Robin flew, fell on the Hedge-Sparrow's back, and, before I could move or really grasp the horror of the situation, the Hedge-Sparrow lay dead beside my hand.

"Later, I dug a grave, and buried the bird, wrapping his little body in ivy-leaves.

"Meanwhile, the Robin watched, sitting nearby, and singing underneath his breath the song I always call the Robin's 'whispering song.'"

. . . . . .

In another note in our Log we have the strange story of a Robin which tried to murder a stuffed Robin!

A lover of Robins heard one warbling just beyond the frontier of his garden, and, wishing to attract him to the garden, thought of the plan of placing on an upper window-sill of the house a beautifully stuffed specimen of the bird—little dreaming of the consequences.

No sooner had the live Robin perceived the dead one, than he began singing in a louder tone and in longer strains, clearly sounding a challenge. Presently he flew near the

window-sill on a tour of inspection, flew away, and returned to attack his stuffed relation. So violent was his assault that the stuffed bird fell to the ground, the other hotly pursuing it, and violently attacking it when down. The Robin was so intent on killing the dead bird that he might easily have been caught.

The stuffed bird was now rescued ; whereupon the live Robin began strutting about with expanded tail and in an erect attitude, as if claiming and pronouncing victory. All through the rest of the day he kept watch in the garden lest his rival should dare to reappear, and he was singing his songs of triumph long after the shades of evening had fallen.

After the Robin, the Bullfinch, all in all, is surely the most lovable of British birds. It has few more devoted lovers than an eighty-year-old ex-gardener, now living in retirement on the estate of his employer, a noble Earl of Sussex. One day—about forty years ago—his employer ordered him to shoot some Bullfinches which were attacking his fruit-buds. Now the good old man holds that Bullfinches, though they destroy many buds, also destroy the grubs within. And he is devoted to the birds. But his master insisted—go they must. Very reluctantly, our friend went forth with his gun. (We half suspect he had taken the shot from the cartridges.) As he raised the gun to fire, a Bullfinch flew down from a tree and settled on his barrel.

" How could I shoot un then, my Lord ? " he asked the Earl.

He had his way—for he is a good old Sussex man, and lives up to the Sussex motto, " Won't be druv ! "—and to this day the orchard on that estate is a sanctuary to all birds.

CHAPTER II

THE WAKING MOON

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter, slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!

COLERIDGE.

IN the frosty February of 1929 normal Nature-notes for the month began to appear in our Log about the twenty-first day of March. But we had many records of songs sung on bright, cold days by Robins, Wrens, Hedge-Sparrows, Chaffinches, Titmice, and Goldcrests singing "Zee ze, zee ze, zeezezezee." The Chaffinch's song of February becomes an ever more rollicking and finished performance. "Other little birds cannot pick up seeds as *I* do!" is one attempt at a translation of the notes.

The crooning of Wood-Pigeons is among the typical February notes which make us lift up our hearts, and the birds are seen collecting twigs for their scanty nests, as they strut about tree-branches, cooing the while. Lapwings utter their Spring calls, and cry "pee-wit" about the fallows and ploughlands where they intend to entrust their eggs to the keeping of the bare ground. Greenfinches sing a long-drawn note, like the word, "Breeze." Before the month is out Green Woodpeckers utter their exultant, laughing cry, like a joyous "hurrah!" sure token of Spring on the way. They and the Great Spotted Woodpeckers may be heard "drumming" on trees. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

may be overheard, singing low notes to a mate. Partridges go in pairs.

Thrush-song was scarce through the cold spell of February, 1929, and nobody heard a Blackbird singing in frost-bitten countrysides. Records kept by a branch of the Royal Meteorological Society give some average dates of the first-heard bird-songs for the whole of the British Isles over a period of thirty-five years, as noted by qualified observers, and the average date given for the first song of the Mistle-Thrush in a new year is January 18th, and of the Song-Thrush, January 23rd, while the average Blackbird of the British Isles does not begin to sing until February 10th. Nor does the Sky-Lark, in these records, soar and sing until February 11th.

On the day of St. Valentine—the Bishop whose diocese is the air, whose parishioners are the birds—we remember that according to tradition this is the birds' wedding-day, as many birds seem to be aware. When two Jackdaws are seen perched side by side on the weather-vane of a church on that day, we may suppose they consider themselves wedded, though they may have been faithful mates for many years. They are believed to mate for life, and this is saying much if it be true they live to be a hundred years old. Before February 28th, Jackdaws are dropping sticks into their nesting-places in the church belfry. From the old church tower comes merry music from the Starlings as they click their beaks—clash their tiny castanets, as the poet puts it—and whistle finely.

The great frost of February, '29, was little felt in the south-west country, whence came records which made north-countrymen envious. The decorator of our Log pictured Hedge-Sparrows making love. This the little cock does with the outward sign of a great flirting and shuffling of his wings, hence he has earned the name, Shuffle-wing. With feathers fluffed out he hops and sidles to his

demure little enchanter, every now and then whistling his song, with head cocked on one side, as if to take note of the effect. Also a saucy little Wren was observed entering a room to help itself to some darning-wool, which wool was later found in a nest among ivy.

Our decorator sketched a Grey Wagtail, one of our loveliest birds, arrayed in Canary-like feathers, with a black

gorget in Summer, and a tail remarkably long even for a Wagtail, as it was seen balancing for a second in mid-stream on an old stump, with its yellow coat, backed by purple Alders, reflected in the water. This brought a story to our Log of a Pied Wagtail which took to haunting a bird-table in the garden, an unusual visitor. It behaved in an aggressive manner to all-comers, though it sought but one dainty which chanced to be liberally supplied—Stilton

cheese, a mightily powerful lure for many birds. So devoted is this Wagtail to cheese that it enters a dining-room fearlessly at lunch-time, to stuff itself on Stilton, and then retires for a while to an arm-chair, and preens its feathers, afterwards dancing about for a spell on the carpet, cheeping sweet notes, and looking very vain of its dapper coat. So the secret of luring Wagtails to a garden bird-table is a plentiful supply of cheese.

The Mosquito larva which figures in our Log was observed with many others in a shallow ditch ; queer creatures, with mouths set about by bristles. Pass a hand over them, and they sink out of sight, but soon are pressing their mouths again to the surface-film.

The following notes picked at random from our Log, tell of a few other tokens of Spring which fortunate people may hope to see in the course of February :

Rooks pay much attention to their nest-trees, and repairing work goes on. Herons nest. Tree- and House-Sparrows begin to build. Sparrows (not a fortunate sight to see) attack the flowers of Crocus and Polyanthus. Blackbirds begin to nest. (We had this note : " A Blackbird is laying in her last year's nest.") Stock-Doves court, smacking their wings the while.

Pipistrelles are commonly seen, flying round farm buildings in sunshine.

Tortoiseshell butterflies come forth from winter quarters.

One Earwig was seen, laying yellowish eggs among stones. A Dormouse awoke from winter sleep, and looked out at the world.

Frogs, Toads, and Snails appear ; Slow-Worms emerge from winter sleep here and there, and a few Adders likewise. Frogs-spawn may be observed.

In favoured places we expect Snowdrops—Candlemas-Bells—by Candlemas Day. Lesser Celandines should become plentiful this month. Primroses in mild Februaries

are to be found in Sussex woods. Coltsfoot makes a brave show on the borders of ploughlands, though as yet lacking the leaves shaped like a colt's foot. Wild Arum leaves push up bravely in hedgerows. Speedwell blooms, the bluest of all our blue wild flowers, and Dog's-Mercury, of the lowly company of green flowers. Golden catkins, whose flowers

bear honey, open on the Sallows, and draw a host of bees and flies to these hospitable taverns.

On all these accounts we named February, " The Waking Moon."

A Yarn of a Jackdaw

The note in our February calendar about Jackdaws nesting reminded an old soldier of a remarkable yarn,

the recording of which kept our goose-quill busy for some time.

My best bird friend (he related) was a Jackdaw. Now some people call the Jackdaw a thief and a mischief-maker, and say he has a harsh voice. But I love his voice, and admire the sunny side of his character.

My Jackdaw pal was a Greek, born on the hills of Salonika in 1917. Some one caught him as a fledgling and brought him to our hospital, where I was a fixture in a tent. Jack chose to live by my bedside. Sister helped me to feed him with soaked biscuit and bits of meat on a little stick. He wanted attention about every quarter-of-an-hour, but this gave me something to think about beside my aches and pains.

Every night Jack went with Sister to her quarters, a quarter-of-a-mile across the mountain-side, returning in the morning on her shoulder. When he learnt to fly, he would follow her of his own accord, sometimes running beside her, or flying on a little way, and then waiting. He never came alone, and he never visited any other lines but ours. He would spend the whole of each day in our tent, and was never idle for a moment.

When beds were being made, he would take a corner of a sheet, and pull. If we were washing, he would be certain to feel thirsty, and would sample the water, or he would be filled with longing to find out the taste of soap.

Presently the Medical Officer would make his rounds. Jack would always be waiting with Sister to receive him. Solemnly he would hop from bed to bed, and appear to take an interest in each case, and ponder on such questions as to whether diet should be " light," or " full." Should there be need to remove a bandage, Jack would offer his assistance. Did the M.O. lay an instrument on a bed, Jack would carry it away with him, with a look which seemed to say, " This might get lost ! "

Nothing could rebuff him. "Why be so serious?" he seemed to say. "I'll win a laugh from you—all you have to do is to look at me. This is the way I help to win the war."

Inspection over, Sister would pour some water into a basin for the M.O. so that he might wash his hands, and this was the chance for a daily joke with Jack. He would

hurry to the basin and take a plunge, splashing wildly, and refusing to abdicate in favour of the medical powers, who retreated in his honour, or else were thoroughly splashed.

Next came dinner. Jack took an interest in everyone whose diet was not slops, and he took toll from every friend. Any tit-bits which he could not eat he would hide in treasure-houses of his own. Later in the afternoon, when the patients were sleeping, he would re-discover these treasures, bones,

potatoes, and rubbish of all kinds, and tuck them under our pillows, whispering the while, with mischief in his little grey and knowing eyes, " This will be nice for you when you wake up, old friend ! "

His special passion was a little jar wherein thermometers were kept. He knew they were forbidden fruit, and as they stood on a table close by my bed, he would wait for his chance to raid the jar while I was dozing. If he thought I were asleep, he would approach the thermometers with a strutting gait, while he looked the other way, so that if I chanced to be awake after all, he might make me think that some quite different plan were in his mind.

" 'Ware Jackdaw ! " somebody would cry—probably too late to save the thermometers, for Jack would be flying merrily off, to crack one in half on the tent-ridge.

Later would come a day of reckoning ; but any one of us would stand whipping-boy for Jack. Each month, as Sister made out the breakage list, we were ready with suggestions to account for cracked thermometers : " Knocked off a table by Smith on his crutches—accidentally bitten in the fevered mouth of Jones."

Never was there a dull moment when Jack was in the tent. He was our Court jester, and always succeeded in keeping his Court merry. He did his best for us, did Jack.

The Wren's Réveille

The story of the Wren which stole the darning-wool brought us this yarn of another Wren, and how it sounded réveille :

" Every morning at seven o'clock I am awakened by a series of chirrups and trills following each other in long succession, uttered by the Wren who is my ' knocker-up.' His voice is quite three times larger than his size ! One morning I thought he might like to see who it was he was calling.

But when I showed myself the impudent little bird, after he had quickly eyed me up and down from toe to top, turned his back upon me, and finished his song before flying away.

" One day in April I missed my caller, but presently he appeared at the window, gave me two quick ' wake up, wake up ' chirrups, and flew away as if in a tremendous hurry,

though he felt he must just find time to call me as usual. I expect he had been blessed by a family that morning ! "

Jemima, the Rook

The yarn about the tame Jackdaw brought a lovely story of Jemima, a tame Rook.

She was blown into a home out of her own by a tragic

wind, and quickly took possession of the house and all human inmates. She was provided with a perch on a writing-desk, where she sat, a dozing, contented bundle, crooning when stroked, tucking her head under her wing in confiding sleep, making baby " quarks " in answer to any endearment, " squarking " stridently and persistently for food every half-hour, and gobbling out a choked " co-op—co-op," as she gulped for both the food and the finger on which it was offered.

When she began to feel her feet, she would walk with staggering fox-trot gait across the room or into the garden, where there are entrancing treasures to find, stones, sticks—carried pipe-wise in her beak—and an old kitchen fork. She practised the steps of country dancing, and her " siding " and " turning single " were done in admirable style. Her balance was uncertain, but a little row of paint-brushes, which later developed into a tail, helped to maintain it.

The Deerhound—hitherto the lord of all hearts and secure in his lordship—was sighted ; a wild rush on unsteady legs, helped by a flutter of wings, preceded an impudent tweak of the grey tail, resulting in an astonished, dignified stare from the hound, who retreated to his own corner, and for days after always disappeared as soon as he heard the mischievous " squark " which greeted his appearance. This tyranny could not be overlooked. After a few taps on the beak, and sharp " No's," Jemima's intelligence took the hint, so that now she casts a calculating eye on the tempting tail, and then wisely turns her attention to other joys.

Jemima's safety was considered doubtful if Jane, the cat, intent on maternal cares, were encountered. Jemima was walking in the garden when Jane arrived on the scene. She saw the bird, stalked her for a few yards, and crouched. Jemima cocked a curious eye at the intruder, and then made a rush, with an enormous " squark," into the face of the

astonished cat, and Jane fled amain, and continues so to do whenever they meet.

Jemima has a wide taste in food—meat, fruit, vegetables, pudding, and potatoes are all to her fancy. She is a bit of an epicure, and if offered margarine and butter will see the difference at many yards away, and will rush for the butter.

One of her tricks is to shake a tap, asking for the water to be turned on for her bath.

She delights in being taken for a walk on the moor, and if she wanders out of sight will always answer a call. She likes to jump on a stick, and to be carried. When set down, she enjoys hunting Spiders, Earwigs, and Ants, which her mighty pulls at the sods unearth ; also she hunts for Bilberries, eating them with obvious delight. When energetic, she will hop down off the stick, and follow her friends with a fine strutting gait.

At night, she enjoys a " children's hour," when she sits on somebody's hand, and talks in her own way until she drops asleep.

. . . . . .

Another Robin note :

" *Our* tame Robin comes into the house, flies on to a shelf under a mirror, looks at himself in the glass—and then begins to sing ! "

CHAPTER III

THE ROARING MOON

Oh ! what a dawn of day—
How the March sun feels like May !

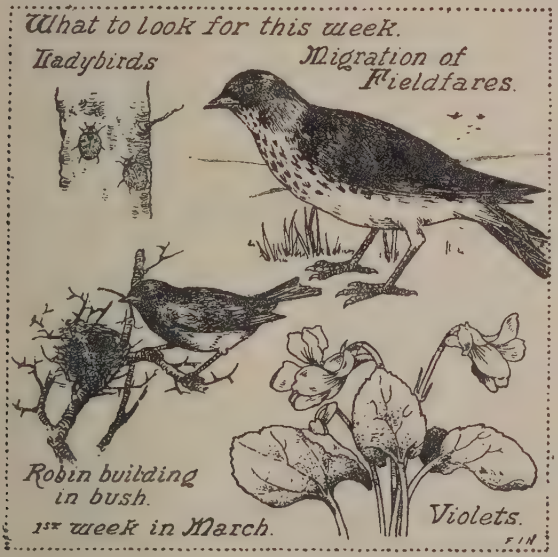
"THE Roaring Moon of Daffodil," was the poet's phrase for March. Some critics think he was carried away by the fine sound, in those words, of the repeated " o's." Still, we know that March can come in roaring like a lion, as it can come in like a lamb—whether hot or chilled. We invented several new titles for the month, as the Lamb—the Wind—the Crocus—the Catkin—the Rook—the Frog—or the Good Hope Moon. But in the end we went back to the poet's name. Some thought " The Roaring Moon " was the just name, carrying a suggestion of the proverbial March winds. Others, thinking of the wild Daffodils dancing in Sussex forests and in meadows " 'twixt Severn and Wye," voted for Daffodil Moon.

Certainly March is the Moon of Good Hope. Hearts are uplifted by the sight of Violets and Anemones, of Brimstone Butterflies hovering once more over Primrose banks, and at the droning of the bees among the Sallows.

Within the first week of March we may be listening once again to the high-pitched, repeated, Hawk-like cry of the Wryneck in the wine-hued Elm-tops, and may catch a glimpse of its chequered plumage, as it " wryly " turns its head from side to side. This bird is the " Cuckoo's Herald."

From overseas comes in the little white-rumped Wheatear, to keep the shepherd company on lonely sheep-walks.

It cuts a handsome figure in its coat of bluish grey feathers, with its white eye-stripes, black wings, and flashing white rump. Its habit is to flutter along before a wayfarer, and it is given to perching on walls and rocks, flicking its tail, and sounding a sharp call-note, like the sound of two pebbles striking together. The bird's name is a puzzling one, but there is an old meaning to the word " ear "—to plough ;



and Wheatears arrive in ploughing days. Another migrant due in March, the Yellow Wagtail, has earned the name Barley-Bird, from arriving at the time when barley is sown. We look to find this handsome bird, in Canary-like hues, picking insects among the feet of grazing cattle.

The Ring-Ouzel, the Blackbird with a white necklet, appears this month on Dartmoor and other moorland and mountain haunts, where it resides until the end of September,

when it departs to winter somewhere by the Mediterranean. The wild sweet song of these birds is in harmony with the spirit of the moor.

Before March is out we expect to see the dusky little Sand-Martins in the sand-pits where they nest, or by steep river banks, the heralds of the Swallow tribe—our one Swallow which does not share the shelter of our houses.

Most welcome of all the truant birds which come back to us in the Roaring Moon is the Chiffchaff, a slender little greenish-brownish Warbler, whose two notes from which it is named ring out like a quiet bell, and put a spirit of youth into everything. Its simple song—" chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff," many times repeated, is among the most eagerly awaited of all the songs of the year, and certainly the little birds as they brave the gales of March tell a tale of good hope. The magic of Spring is in their " chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff "—music which sets the wild Daffodils dancing.

Our Log-Book's decorator found no lack of subjects wherewith to illustrate our records of the Roaring Moon.

Lady-birds gave one study—those tiny, dainty beetles which do so much good in the world by devouring Greenfly, the enemy of Hops and Roses. A Fieldfare was sketched in contemplative mood, as if making up his mind that as the Swallows were nearly due, it was time for him to be seeking out his nesting-trees in Scandinavia. These Northern Thrushes and their cousins the Redwings are sometimes seen at the same time as Swallows. We had a note for March: " A flock of Redwings making a ' charm ' on the ground." The birds were gathered, with their heads to the wind, giving a farewell concert.

A Robin was sketched at its building. A scented March Violet sat for its portrait—likewise a Dog Violet, so named in reproach for being scentless. Blackthorn blossom told a tale of the shivering days of Blackthorn Winter. A Lapwing showed off his fine silky crest for a moment spared from

courting. Some precocious young Sparrows also obliged by sitting for their portraits. "Crimson Larch Roses" were not forgotten among the March signs, recalling the poet's line, "Rosy plumelets tuft the Larch." As the leaves, of vivid green, begin to show, the reddish-purple female flowers appear, always erect on bare branches.

Down by the river Marsh-Marigolds appear, to lead a

long procession of flowers as the seasons roll. The burnished cups, which shine like fire, bloom from March till June. Among many new flower-faces we welcome that of Stitchwort, like a gleaming white star above the hedge-bank grasses. About the trunks of old woodland trees we rejoice again to find Wood-Sorrel, our British sensitive plant, whose delicately pencilled white blooms and leaves close before rain, as for the night—one of our daintiest wild flowers.

This also is a Cuckoo's herald, and has the old name, Cuckoo's-meat. A humble and lowly flower of March is the Moschatel—named Adoxa, or without glory. It is remarkable for its curious design, having five green flowers on a stalk, one facing the skies, and supported by four at the sides, like the faces of a church clock ; it gives out a Musk-like scent when wet with dew. Another humble green flower, Dog's-Mercury, is welcome for the green carpet it spreads over the brown floors of the March woods.

Among " flowers of the air " we look this month for the gorgeous Peacock-butterfly, with eye-like marks on the rich wings. Its food-plant is the Stinging-Nettle, where the eggs are laid in April by females which have hibernated through the Winter.

Other notes, taken at random from our Log, run :

The chorus of the song-birds rises daily. Mistle-Thrushes out-sing the March gales.

Rooks are deep in family affairs. Thrushes, Blackbirds, Sparrows, Goldcrests, Wood-pigeons, Wrens, Long-tailed Titmice, Pheasants, Owls, etc., are nesting.

Grass-Snakes and Adders appear after winter sleep.

Dormice wake from winter sleep.

Hedgehogs emerge from winter dormitories, and roam the fields at night for Beetles.

Foxes have cubs. Hares suffer from Spring-fever—" March madness "—and caper and fight. Rabbits have young. A young Squirrel was seen with its parents.

Hawthorn hedges begin to be pied with verdure.

Frogs Eat with their Eyes

The name, Frog Moon, for March, appealed to the fancy of several of our band of observers, for we associate March with Frogs, Toads, and Tadpoles, and, where the Edible

Frog is at home, with its croaking song of Spring. The suggestion of this name brought an amusing note :

" A book in our school, *Living Creatures*, explains how the beautiful eyes of the Frog, with the golden iris, help the Frog to swallow its food. If you see a Frog eating, you will notice that the eyes shut as it swallows.

" The Frog lives on flies, other insects, and worms.

Flies it takes with its tongue. The base of the tongue is attached to the floor of the mouth in front. The forked end is folded backwards towards the throat. When flicked forward at a fly, the end scrapes from the roof of the mouth a sticky secretion near the front of the palate, then is shot out beyond the mouth with extraordinary speed.

" There is no hope for the insect touched by the sticky tongue-tip. Lapped up quicker than the eye can see,

it is carried into the mouth, and to the top of the gullet.

" Now the Frog rolls its eyes, and gulps.

" The eyeballs are separated from the gullet by a soft membrane, and by strong ligament and muscle can be pressed down on the food, to start it on its journey down the Frog's red lane.

" Worms are taken in the Frog's jaws. The upper one is bordered by teeth, and there are patches of teeth in the roof of the mouth for holding a wriggling worm fast. When swallowing a worm, the eyes roll furiously."

. . . . . .

Very few of us had known about this unique use of the Frog's eyes.

Seen on the Trail

These notes following reveal a seeing eye :

" Once upon a time, coming quietly along a field at the side of a wood, I saw a Rabbit and a Partridge fighting. What the quarrel can have been about I cannot imagine, but they were very fierce—the Partridge jumping in and beating with its wings, and Rabbit kicking up with its hind legs. I watched them for several minutes.

" Another day, on the Cheviots, I sat by a cairn, and after a little while I heard a queer, small cough, and out came a Weasel. Another followed, and the two played in and out of the stones, chasing each other about like two kittens, tumbling with each other and pretending to bite—very pretty to watch.

" Then I found a tiny cave in a steep bank, and saw what looked like a nest within, and inside was a mother Hedgehog and a family of babies. The little ones I found had soft bristles instead of hard spines.

" Out on the hill I looked into what we call a ' sheep,' a deep narrow ditch, and saw, under an overhanging bank, a little hand, pink and strong, dimpled, and no bigger than my thumb-nail. It so happened I was near the place where the last fairy in Scotland was seen : and I wondered if I had found one ! I looked again ; at the edge of the water a little Mole lay on its back, with one foot moving in the

current, which looked exactly like a tiny fairy hand."

Another sent this note :

" Going along a favourite trail, I heard a Blackbird's whistle, and when I glanced up to see ' the coal-black singer with the crocus bill '—lo !—it was a snow-white Blackbird."

I liked this little night-piece :

" In the middle of the night, an Owl screeched and roused

a Thrush, which after rattling an alarm, sang a few notes of his song before settling to sleep again ! "

Ladies First

The Log this month contains two records of the extraordinary politeness of cock Chaffinches. The first runs :

" We have as friends a wonderfully tame pair of Chaffinches which come to our bird-table. The moment any scraps are put out ' Charles ' is sure to see them. He then flies down, and calls repeatedly, ' Sweet, sweet ! ' and very rarely touches the food until his little wife, ' Charlotte,' arrives to share it with him. ' Ladies first ' is his motto ! "

This yarn brought the following :

" One winter morning I was late in feeding the birds. A cock Chaffinch, a regular visitor, evidently was hungry, for he came and tapped on the window, and kept calling. I put out his breakfast, but he did not at once fall to. He came a little nearer, examined the fare, looked round to see if any cats were about, then flew away to a rose-bush, where he delivered himself of several loud calls. I heard a distant answer, ' Pink, pink ! ' Then Mrs. Chaffinch arrived, and the two went to breakfast. I watched several mornings, and the same thing always happened—Mr. Chaffinch's clear call to breakfast was heard each day."

And here is a yarn of a gallant cock Blackbird :

" In the snowy days I was watching the bird-table when suddenly a cock Blackbird dashed up, and drove off all the other birds, clearing the table in a moment of all its guests. He then walked up and down the table for a few minutes until a hen Blackbird arrived. In a courteous way he stood by until she had made a good meal, when they flew off together, and the other birds came back to their interrupted breakfast."

Britain's Rarest Snake

Not only the Adder and the Grass-Snake emerge in March after winter sleep, but the rare snake called Coronella, though it is seen by few. This snake measures about two feet, and is of brownish hue. It lives on lizards and mice. If annoyed, it emits an unpleasant scent, and rises on its tail, in a ferocious attitude, to hiss and dart out its tongue—but it is perfectly harmless. On waking from winter sleep, it casts its slough, shedding its entire covering, including the scales over the eyes, and turning it inside out in the process and this it does several times in the course of the year.

A Hedge-Sparrow-Wren

In his book, *The Charm of Birds*, Viscount Grey of Fallodden made this naïve confession : " I arrived at the age of manhood knowing only two songs of individual birds ; one was the Robin, whose tameness and persistence in singing when there is hardly another song to be heard force everyone to know his voice ; the other was ' *Thrushes-and-Blackbirds*,' between which I could not distinguish, and which, for the purpose of song, represented to me one species."

I was reminded of Lord Grey's " Thrushes-and-Blackbirds " by the following Nature-note contributed to our Log by a twelve-year-old :

" As I was walking along the road to see what I could see, I came to a low wall covered by ivy. Suddenly I heard a rustle in the ivy near me, and, looking up, I saw a little Wren. Looking in the ivy I saw a little nest lined with horsehair, and inside four little pure blue eggs. As I looked at the nest I heard a twitter, and, looking up, I saw the Wren, so, fearing she would desert her eggs, I went away."

It must have been a Hedge-Sparrow-Wren !

I have sometimes myself confused Hedge-Sparrow with Wren, and Wren with Hedge-Sparrow, or, rather, their songs, for they sing the same tune, but in different ways. The Hedge-Sparrow is no Sparrow, but is a Warbler, and its song has more of the quality of warbling than the Wren's, and lacks the brilliance of the trill which concludes the Wren's merry lilt.

Bobbie does the Honours

This was the Robin story of this month's Log :

" We went to look at an empty cottage in Sussex which was ' To Let,' and as we came to the garden gate, saw on the doorstep of the cottage, huddled in a most dejected attitude, with head bent down, the figure looking lifeless and entirely hopeless, a Robin Redbreast.

" At the click of the latch of the gate a magical change came over the little bird. Instantly he stood upright and alert, with legs set wide apart, head held high, and a look of eager curiosity in his black beads of eyes. As we opened the gate, he came hopping down the path to meet us, and, having bowed his respects, he turned, and showed us the way to the front door.

" We opened the door, and the Robin hopped before us, into the empty cottage. And then, in the most charming way, he showed us over the house, hopping and hovering about us, entering each room, and uttering now and then an encouraging little note, as much as to say, ' How happily we can all live here together ! '

" And we have done so, ever since."

CHAPTER IV

THE PRIMROSE MOON

The Palm and May make country houses gay.
Lambs frisk and play, the shepherds pipe all day.
And we hear aye the birds tune this merry lay—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta woo !

THOMAS NASH (1567–1601.)

THE JEWEL OF TIME

FOR our opening words for our Log for April we copied the following pleasant passage from a work entitled *The Twelve Moneths*, published in 1661 :

" The youth of the country make ready for the Morris dance, and the merry milkmaid supplies them with ribbons her true love had given her. The little fishes lie nibbling at the bait, and the porpoise plays in the pride of the tide. The shepherd entertains the princes of Arcadia with pleasant roundelays. The aged feel a kind of youth, and youth hath a spirit full of life and activity ; the aged hairs refreshen, and the youthful cheeks are as red as a cherry.

" The Lark and the Lamb look up at the sun, and the labourer is abroad by the dawning of the day. The Sheep's eye in the Lamb's head tells kind-hearted maids strange tales, and faith and troth make the true-lover's knot. It were a world to set down the worth of this month ; for it is Heaven's blessing and the earth's comfort. It is the messenger of many pleasures ; in sum, there is much to be spoken of it ; but, to avoid tediousness, I hold it, the jewel of time and the joy of nature."

To this our author added a little poem in praise of April, bidding us take heart of grace when April showers fall :

> When we despair, thy seasonable showers
> Comfort the corn, and cheer the drooping flowers ;
> As if thy charity could not but impart
> A shower of tears to see us out of heart.
> Sweet, I have penned thy praises, and here I bring it,
> In confidence the birds themselves will sing it.

Many sweets we added to the list given by this author as belonging to the month which is " the jewel of time "—the greening of the earth, the return of the song-birds, Cuckoo and Swallow and Nightingale, and all our truant friends as they came trooping home, " song and dipping wing." We heard a country child calling out, on first spying Peggy Whitethroat on a hedge whitening with the snow of Blackthorn blossom :

> Pretty Peggy Whitethroat,
> Come stop and give us a note.

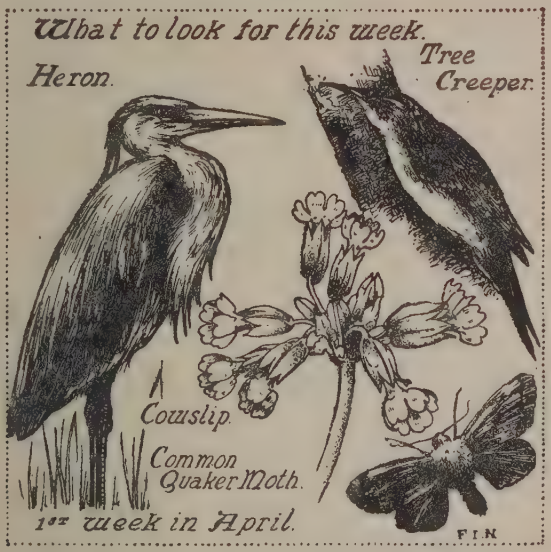
Peggy is sure to do that, as she goes about on her self-appointed duties as sentry of the hedgerows.

The following notes about summer migrants were copied into our Log from a report issued by a branch of the Royal Meteorological Society, based on records for the whole of the British Isles through thirteen years : the dates are those when the birds mentioned were first seen or heard in April. Our own Birch-Bark Roll observers easily beat these records, but they are of interest as setting up a standard :

Chiffchaff, 6th ; Wheatear, 7th ; Ring-Ouzel, 7th ; Wryneck, 14th ; Willow-Wren, 16th ; Sand-Martin, 20th ; Tree-Pipit, 22nd ; Blackcap, 22nd ; Yellow Wagtail, 24th ; Sandpiper, 25th ; Redstart, 26th ; House-Martin, 27th ; Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat, 29th ; Grasshopper-Warbler and Reed-Warbler, 30th.

The average date of the Swallow's first appearance as

recorded through thirty-five years in the British Isles is given as April 21st, and of the Cuckoo's first song as April 26th, and of the Nightingale's, May 5th. Nightingale and Cuckoo often make a close race home, and may arrive on any April day. In the times when omens were observed,



it was considered fortunate to hear a Nightingale before a Cuckoo. The poet Milton thus addressed the Nightingale :

> Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
> First heard before the shallow Cuckoo's bill,
> Portend success in love.

Other dates of first appearances for April given by the Royal Meteorological Society include Wood Anemone, April 1st, Blackthorn blossom, April 11th, Queen Wasp flying in the open, April 16th, Small White Butterfly,

April 25th, Acorns on stems of Oak, April 25th, Red (Dessert) Currant in bloom, April 25th.

June 28th is given as the average date of the final call of a Cuckoo.

All the moods of April are reflected in our Log, its showers, and its sunny hours—Blackthorn Winter too.

The Nightingale sang to us on the first day, and at dawn one morning we heard the Nightingale and the Sky-Lark singing in unison—the song of " good night " merging into the song of " good day." The Sky-Lark sang a long song—within five seconds of six minutes. One night we heard a Wood-Lark singing at 11 o'clock (Greenwich time). In its last year's nest a House-Martin warbled at 3 a.m. A Swallow nested in a wide chimney, thus justifying its old-time name, Chimney-Swallow. Swifts came flashing into our village at something like two hundred miles an hour to seek their old homes in thatched eaves. The Spotted Flycatcher came faithfully back to the creeper against the house, wherein it has nested—for how many summers? The Redstart nested again in its old haunt, among some stones in the garden. The Sedge-Warbler returned to sing its scolding medley of notes in the reed-bed, by day and by moonlight. The Whinchat sought out the furze-bushes on the Downs ; Garden-Warblers found the orchard, and set the blossom of the Cherries to music. Tree-Pipits were seen once again, launching themselves to mount the air from tree-tops, as if trying their best to emulate the Larks. Snipe " drummed " (i.e. produced a curious drumming sound while flying, supposed to be caused by the action of the air on some of their feathers) as they flew above the ploughland where their eggs lay. And the voice of the Turtle-Dove was heard again in our land.

All through April the little Leaf-Warblers came trooping in. Early in April the Chiffchaffs of March are followed by their cousins the Willow-Wrens and the Wood-Wrens,

which also are slender little birds in olive-green feathers, building domed nests on the ground. The Willow-Wren is one of the most abundant and best-loved of all migrant song-birds. Its song is like a refined edition of the homely stave of the Chaffinch—in a minor key, pure, sweet, and with pathos, it ranks among our most precious bird-songs. It runs down the scale in a cadence, like the chime of fairy

bells. Enduring for three seconds, it is repeated the live-long day at eight-second intervals, bringing to mind the words, "That strain again—it had a dying fall." The Wood-Wren's tinkling, trilling song is rarer: it makes the day red-lettered. Often this is heard among the Beech-leaves, and sometimes while the little Warbler flutters across a woodland glade.

The Cuckoo brings the Cuckoo-flowers, known also as

Lady's-Smocks from the way they cover the meadows as with linen laid out to bleach.

Among rarer wild flowers (Primroses, Cowslips, Bluebells, Violets, Marsh-Marigolds, etc., we take for granted in the April Log !) we may find the Fritillary or Snake's-head, with its curious drooping flower of Tulip shape, chequered with pink and purple.

" Death-Watch beats " was a note made by Gilbert White of Selborne in his " Naturalist's Calendar " for April. We also noted hearing a Death-Watch Beetle tapping out its love-call in an old church pew. Overhead, with the last days of April, we found, on clambering among the bells, that the Jackdaws had full clutches of eggs in their nests. One nest contained, besides sticks, rags, couch-grass, sheep's-wool, oak-apples, sacking, and bits of newspaper.

Lady-birds and Dragon-flies appear. The Large White Butterfly is on the wing, also the Green-Veined White, the Orange-tip, the small Copper and the Holly Blue.

Trees burgeon and flower ; none more lovely than the Wild Cherry, in white bridal attire, especially when a Garden-Warbler makes it his song-platform.

In truth, of this month, " there is much to be spoken." It is the " Jewel of Time." But the name we give it is " Primrose Moon."

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Concerning the Green Woodpecker, an unusual observation found its way into the Log this month : that one developed a passion for digging up the bulbous roots of Buttercups on a lawn : he would dig such deep holes, that one would have thought an animal was at work, and would linger with his bill plunged into the sod as if he were drinking. The gardener thought it was a pity he did not care about Plantains.

Walking in Woods

Rather a pretty thing found its way into our Log this month, entitled "A Fantasy," having a moral attached in a postscript, one with which I heartily agree—a great truth. As children know if you love children, as dogs know if you love dogs, so birds know the bird-lover. They do not fly

away from gentle people who love their company. When the heroine of this fantasy passed through a flock of feeding Rooks, they gave her friendly caws whereas, we are told, "Had she been the farmer's boy they would have flown a mile." I expect the Rooks knew the farmer's boy was fond of throwing stones, and shooting with a catapult. To the heroine of the piece the wood was a cathedral—"She passed quietly down the nave." She knew how to walk in woods,

unheard and unseen, and well she knew that the whole art of seeing and hearing birds, and making friends with them in a wood, is to sit still on a pile of faggots.

A Fantasy

As Silvia opened the doors of the cottage at five o'clock in the evening, Jenny Wren, who had been watching the door from a pile of logs, instantly passed the word to Peggy Dishwasher, stationed in the field, "Here she comes—she's off to evensong in the Wilderness."

The Wagtail flew to the edge of the pond in the Wilderness to tell the Moorhens, "Silvia's coming!"

As she crossed the meadow the Rooks gave her friendly caws in greeting. Had she been the farmer's boy they would have flown a mile.

By the time she reached the gate with the puzzle-chain, all the birds in the Wilderness knew she was coming, for Moorhens had passed the word to the Blackbirds, skulking about the undergrowth, and they passed it to the Thrushes in the tree-tops, they to the Jays, and they to the Magpies, and they to the Robins. One Robin went in a hurry to tell Mrs. Pheasant, who had just laid her first egg in a nest near some faggots which generally served Silvia for a pew when attending evensong.

As she passed quietly down the nave of the woodland cathedral, every bird gave her greeting.

"It's like being in the heart of a song," she thought.

Primroses shone beside her path, like stars of good hope lighting her footsteps.

The Thrushes were taking choir-duty that evening. Perhaps there were only three or four in the choir, but their anthems filled all the wood.

Silvia took her pew.

Mrs. Pheasant stole away from her nest nearby as Silvia flung herself down on the faggots.

"Now," thought the bird, who was cramped, "is the chance for an airing. *She* will guard my egg."

When the birds had finished their service they sang a roundelay. Silvia, emptying out a pocketful of crumbs for

her favourite tame Robin, tried to fit words to the tune, but only made up nonsense. This really was the chorus :

Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling ;
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling ;
To her let us garlands bring.

The birds thought that Silvia quite understood as, when

they had finished, she rose from the faggot-pew, dropped them a curtsey, and blew them a kiss before going home.

. . . . . .

P.S.—*Moral:* If you love the birds, they know it.

. . . . . .

A Jackdaw Actor

The story of the Salonika Jackdaw brought an amusing yarn from one of a syndicate of six schoolgirls, who had brought a Jackdaw up from fledgling state. He was allowed to join in all the school activities—except lessons—would cheer on the school side at matches, sit on the shoulders of waiting batsman, or follow the umpires across the pitch. He would come when called or whistled. Full of mischief, he loved to rifle desks for india-rubbers and pens, and especially for pocket-money ; if detected, he would look a picture of innocence, with his head on one side, and he would always be the first to help search for a missing article which he had hidden in a private cache.

One term the school actors played " The Jackdaw of Rheims," with Jack in the leading part. He proved a consummate actor. He " sat in the Cardinal's chair," and hopped " over pastries and dishes " in the greatest style, and took the Cardinal's ring, though he did not always return it when he should. One thing Jack never liked—the Cardinal's cursing, which sounded like scolding, and he hated to be scolded. After being cursed, he took to going on strike for the rest of the play, so an understudy—a bird made up of canvas and feathers—was provided to act the later scenes. On the great day of the performance both Jack and the understudy received many rounds of applause. Directly the play was over, Jack, with a cry giving vent to long bottled-up rage, flew for the imitation bird, knocked it from a table

to the floor, and, still screaming, dragged it round and round by the tail, then, dancing triumphantly, proceeded to peck it to pieces, feather by feather ! The Crows are the most intelligent of birds : who can doubt that Jackdaws are the most intelligent of the Crows ?

Strange Bedfellows

An old story tells of a Sparrow which built in a Sparrow-Hawk's nest, and was permitted by the Hawk to rear its brood. A note in our Log for this month tells of as great a wonder : how a Kestrel and a Magpie built their nests within three yards of one another in a dead, ivy-covered Oak. Very possibly, the Kestrel had taken possession of an old nest of the Magpie. At one time it was thought that the Magpie had deserted. Our vigilant observers spent a whole day in a " hide," and never once saw the sitting bird. Then one climbed the tree, and reported that the Magpie had hatched her eggs, and the nest was full of " nothing but mouths." The Kestrel's eggs were then on the point of hatching ; the hen took no notice of our observers, flying to and from her nest quite regardless of their presence, nor did she seem to have any thoughts of the Magpie. The wonder is the Magpie did not suck the Kestrel's eggs.

Even Chickens set us examples, can be lovely and pleasant in their lives : witness this story following—we dipped our goose-quill in gold before we inscribed it in the Log :

" One of our Bantams brought off two chicks after two weeks' sitting, and was given a coop and run in which to rear them, to the delight of some parent Sparrows which had a hungry brood to feed. One day came a terrific thunderstorm, which lasted several hours. On going to see how the Bantams had fared, we were surprised to see her wings spread, and feathers puffed up. The *entire Sparrow family were sheltering cosily under her wings*. For

months after the Sparrows came every evening to sleep through the night under the Bantam, and they followed her round, like a brood of chickens, through the day-time."

. . . . . .

The last note in our April Log was sent in by a twelve-year-old contributor, who wrote: "It is very funny, but in April everyone seems to be happy!"

CHAPTER V

THE MAY MOON

Come, we'll abroad, and let's obey
The proclamation made for May,
And sin no more, as we have done, by staying ;
But, my Corina, come, let's go a-maying.

HERRICK.

THE best descriptive title for the Moon of May was, we decided—after long argument about it—the May Moon. For the essence of May is May-blossom.

Now at last the tight, round flower-buds of the May-bushes release their treasures, those pretty pink anthers, so well set off by the milk-white blossoms, with their heavy incense which fills all a meadow with fragrance. The flower of the month may be fully out before the gold of the Gorse tarnishes, and then commons and downland valleys are sheeted in white and gold. The May-flowers cluster so densely as to hide the fresh young leaves, and a mile-long hedge appears as if clothed in purest white. Against each spray of blossom we observed the guardian thorn.

Usually there is an interval between the flowering of the May and the appearance of the first wild Rose for a rustic maid to stick in her hair, daring the rivalry to her own complexion ; and the year has no sweeter season than this, " between the May and the Rose." These are the high days of the Nightingale's passion. He is awakening the wild Roses ; this task fulfilled, he will fall silent.

A note was sent to our Log about May-blossom which our

goose-quill pen could scarcely be induced to write, and it blotted the page as it inscribed these words :

" The scent of the flowers is attractive to such insects as are drawn to decayed matter, and the botanist notes that it is partly due to *tri-methylamine*—which gives the odour to dead fish."

In olden days, May-blossom was in repute among the fair sex, and was—and still is—the flower forming the wreath of the Grecian bride. We noted this quaint bit of proverbial lore in the Log :

> The fair maid who, the first of May,
> Goes to the fields at break of day,
> And washes in dew from the Hawthorn tree,
> Will ever after handsome be.

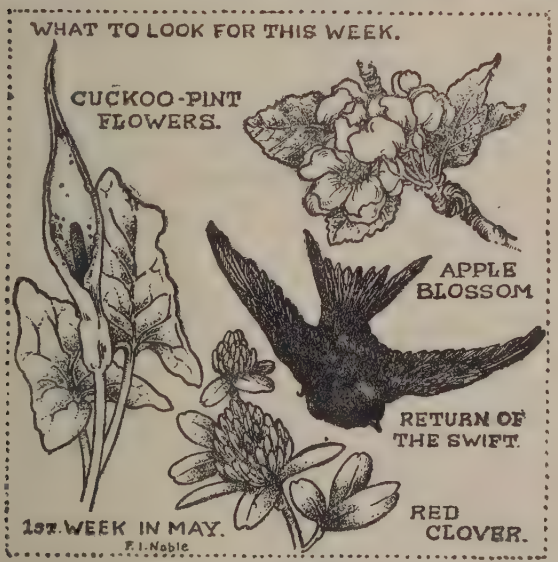
Enter the Swifts

The decorator of our Log made us look for the return of the Swifts in the first week of May. They are among the late bird visitors, like the Turtle-Doves, Spotted Flycatchers, and Nightjars. And Swifts are among the earliest migrant birds to leave our shores as Summer wanes. In the latter days of July or early in August family parties are seen circling high in the air, mere specks against the sky, and then are seen no more.

Except when roosting, Swifts live on the wing, and live at high pressure, for ever flying at a speed of something like two hundred miles an hour. When building their nests, they gather the material in the air—floating straws, grasses, wool, and feathers. They fly in Summer for sixteen hours a day, resting but to roost, or hatch their eggs. Some people will say that the cock birds fly all through the short nights. But if you examine a Swift's nest at night you will find the cock and his mate roosting side by side.

The reason why Swifts never perch like Swallows is that all their four claws point forwards—the Swallow has one claw directed backwards, and with this can cling fast even to a telegraph wire. Sometimes, but rarely, Swifts land on the ground, and usually they rise with difficulty, for the length of the wings hinders the first upward spring.

Those long, scythe-shaped wings offer a test of eyesight;



sharp eyes discern that the wings of a pair work independently, so that one may be raised while the other is depressed, and it may be partly on this account that the birds are the supreme masters of flight.

In the nest under a thatched eave, or perhaps in the side of a chalk-pit, two white eggs are laid. The birds stay to rear but one brood. The young remain a remarkably long time in the nest, until strong to essay their first flight;

they may stay as long as forty or forty-one days. Within a few days of leaving their nest they depart with their parents on their long voyage to Africa or Madagascar.

On first arriving, Swifts are in perfect feathering, with a beautiful bronze gloss to their feathers. This bleaches and fades in the sun before they leave us. They moult after their departure. Cock and hen are alike in plumage, a sooty brown all over except for white on the throat. The tail is short and slightly forked. The outline of the bird in flight is like that of a short-handled axe.

I think, as I watch these eager-hearted birds urging their wild careers round and round our village church, with their wild screeches, that they are almost the most interesting of our Summer bird-visitors. We gave pages of our Log to thoughts about Swifts ; but here must be content with but one note more :

Mem. Swifts have no relation to Swallows.

Old Maids in Clover-Heads

The Swift which figured in our Log found himself flying among Apple-blossom, a Wild Arum, and a spray of Clover. Our goose-quill accordingly traced once again the familiar story of the Wild Arum—Cuckoo-Pint, Wake Robin, Lords-and-Ladies, call it what you will—as a plant which traps insects : how flies walk down the purplish column in its monk-like cowl, with its uncanny flowers—female blossoms, each a single ovary, stamens, and down-pointing hairs—and then find they cannot leave, by reason of these same down-pointing hairs, until they wither—giving permission to the prisoners to fly away with the pollen to the next Arum.

Of the Clover we remarked, that it may or may not have supplied the badge of the Shamrock, but it certainly seems to be the " clubs " of the pack of cards, and the name seems

to be a corruption of the Latin, *clava*, a club (though some trace it to an old Anglo-Saxon word, *Clœfer*, to cleave, a reference to the cleft in the leaf). French cards have the same figure for the suit, and it is called trefoil.

A field of Clover vies with the Bean-field in the sweetness of its odour, and is the haunt of Bees and Butterflies in-

numerable: happy the Bee-keeper whose hives are near a Clover-field.

In the early morning and in evening twilight we observe how the leaves fold together, showing their pale green undersides, sparkling with dew, and they close also in wet weather.

Examine a head of Clover and you find it is not a single flower, but a collection of Pea-like blossoms, each on its own stalk, and provided with calyx, corolla, stamens, and pistil. The seeds are set by the action of the Bees in carrying

the pollen from the stamens of one flower and depositing it on the stigma of another. Watching a head of common white Clover we find that after a Bee has visited a blossom, this turns down, and closes over, so that the next Bee which comes along does not trouble to examine it for honey. The flowers open from below—upward and inward, and we may always see which flowers have been visited by Bees by the way those of a head hang down, as if out of business, while the fresh upstanding blossoms are still courting the Bees. We may find a head of Clover with one solitary blossom upstanding in the centre—an old maid signalling for a lover.

Crab-Apple

A quiet orchard, where the Apple-trees are now beginning to flush rosily, and the Cherries are in full beauty of snowy bloom, is a paradise for the singing-birds, and every old tree offers nesting-sites to Titmouse and Jenny-Wren, Goldfinch and Chaffinch. The blossom, the rugged lines of the gnarled trunks, the air of jollity imparted by a few black-faced lambs leaping over a fallen tree, making the happiest picture of May.

So an old Crab-Apple, set in a sea of Bluebells, makes one of the most radiant tree-studies of the spring woods. But the Crab-tree has stern associations. Its wood is as famed for staves and clubs as that of the Blackthorn. " Fetch me a dozen Crab-tree staves," cried the angry porter in the play, " Henry VIII."—" I'll scratch your heads ! " Before the American wood, Persimmon, came into vogue, Crab-Apple wood was much esteemed for the making of wooden golf-clubs.

Then the juice of the Crab-Apple is so sour that even the boy who will eat nearly anything makes a wry face at it, and uses the apple for cleaning his knife. In days when vinegar was used in making whey, syllabub, or other con-

fectionery, Crab-Apple juice served in its place, and it is still prized as an application for sprains and scalds. An old rhyme runs :

The Crab of the wood is sauce very good for the Crab of the sea.
But the wood of the Crab is sauce for a drab that will not her husband obey.

Little Pictures of May

Among the little pictures of May in our Log is that of the Lily-of-the-Valley, and a rare pleasure it is to find it growing wild, as we may have the fortune to do in favoured woods. A Sussex legend runs, that these flowers, in St. Leonard's Forest, sprang from the blood shed by St. Leonard in the course of a three-days' combat with a dragon.

This saint is supposed to have banished the Nightingale from that forest, because its singing interfered with his devotions : but it has come back now. During May and June, this lowly Lily blooms in the pleasant woods where it is at home, bearing on a stalk about a foot high the fragrant, pure-white little bells, which hang drooping in a long one-sided cluster, suggesting the quaint old name, Ladder-to-Heaven.

The blooming of the grasses in May gave us another decoration. Brome Grass takes its name from *bromus*, food, but the Soft Brome does not live up to its name, and is a useless species growing on poor land. We have a dozen British species, which have what is called a lax panicle, with many-flowered spikelets, compressed at the sides. The Upright Oat-Grass is a familiar member of the family. The Hairy Wood Bromus is found in damp, shady woods ; the Barren Brome Grass is common on all roadsides. Some of our prettiest grasses are of least worth, like the Quaking-Grass, which flourishes on poor soil. A moral is hidden somewhere here.

Hibernating butterflies are still on the wing in the May Moon, and many others are out, while there is a great increase in the number of moths. One pictured in our Log is the beautiful Emperor, to be found on heaths, downs and in woods early in May. It has curiously bird-like markings, and it somewhat suggests a bird's form as it seats itself on a spray of heather on a moor. Then it looks as wise as an Owl, and the plump body suggests a beak, as if to warn off birds.

We have another moth with somewhat bird-like markings, the Magpie, arrayed in black-and-white motley, a colour-scheme also displayed by the caterpillar. From the end of June onwards through the Summer it is found among Currant-bushes in gardens, flying in sunshine and at dusk.

The Garden Carpet Moth also fluttered into our Log.

This is familiar by sight to nearly everyone, as it is the commonest of all the moths which come to gardens, known as *Geometræ*. Its forewings are pale grey or brownish, with patches of dark greyish-brown, and fine wavy lines cross the wings. The caterpillar is often found on the Nasturtium.

In the garden this month we find Solomon's-Seal in bloom (among a few hundred other flowers), and in a few

woods we may find it growing wild, a two-foot high relation of the Lily-of-the-Valley. I never see this handsome plant without calling to mind what was said of it by the Elizabethan herbalist, Gerard: that the crushed root is so powerful a cure for bruises, that it will take away in one night, or two at the most, any bruise caused by "women's wilfulness in stumbling upon their hasty husband's fists." It is as if the old man were saying: "No man would raise

a hand against a woman. Yet it happens sometimes that a wilful woman pays no heed to a hasty husband when he waves his hands about—she runs against them, and so suffers from bruises." Solomon's-Seal then comes to the rescue.

If one takes a root, and cuts it across, the plant's name is explained ; for some marks appear, having the semblance of a seal. This made the old herbalists think it was the property of the plant to seal and heal wounds ; and they supposed it bore the impress of the seal of Solomon, who spoke of plants from the Cedar of Lebanon to the Hyssop on the wall. Especially were the roots valued of old for the mending of broken bones. Gerard wrote of the plant, " That which might be written of this herb, as touching the knitting of bones, and that truly, would seem to some incredible ; but common experience teacheth, that in the world there is not to be found another herb comparable to it for the purpose aforesaid."

Our artist's sketch of a Columbine, growing alongside a Whitethroat's nest, brings to mind the lines of a poet who tells how, in the American woods,

> The Columbine, in purple drest,
> Nods o'er the ground-bird's hidden nest.

The flower—emblem of folly—perhaps because of its harlequin hues, or because the shape of the nectary suggests the caps of the jesters of the old-time Courts—is well known in North America, and all over Europe.

The white flowers of the Great Stitchwort now shine among hedgerow grasses. The botanical name, Stellaria, enshrines their star-like quality. Our unromantic name is from the German word, *stitch*, or sting, for the plant was believed to cure the stings of serpents, or perhaps a stitch in the side. Our fathers called it All-Bones, a jocular reference to its long stem, a foot and a half high, so brittle

that it breaks at a touch. A happier name was Satin-Flower, and as the soft white blossoms, with their pearly tints and golden anthers, gleam among green grasses and Bluebells, we may think they are among the loveliest of our wildings. They hold the eye from a long way off, as a poet observed truly in a song of the May Moon :

> And here is the golden Buttercup
> Like a miser's chest with the gold heap'd up,
> And the Stitchwort with its pearly star,
> Seen on the hedgebank from afar.

A wealth of legendary lore clings about many of the lowliest hedgeside plants ; a long chapter could be written about the Goose-Grass, the starry leaves of which now straggle about every hedge. Leaves, stems, and fruits are all bristly, and cling to the wayfarer who chances to touch them, whether man or animal, hence the names, Cleavers, Scratchweed, and Catchweed. From this clinging habit the Greeks gave the plant a name meaning lover of man. Its many old-time uses are forgotten ; one was as a strainer for filtering milk, the rough leaves and stalks serving well for this when no other strainer was at hand. The juice has been much praised by herbalists as a purifier of the blood, if the plant be chopped up and boiled in broth as a spring tonic. An old writer tells how it was often thus taken in his day, " to keep them lank and lean that were apt to grow fat."

When walking in the country in the gloaming of a May evening we are sometimes startled by the way a Cockchafer comes blundering along, perhaps giving us a stinging blow in the face. If seen at close quarters, the fan-like antennæ repay examination under a microscope. During the day the insect lies low, coming out in the dusk, and thereby providing a tasty mouthful, we may suppose, for such fly-by-night hunters as the Nightjar, an expert in catching

Beetles on the wing. The Beetle feeds on the leaves of trees, and its grubs do much damage to the roots of crops, living for three years underground before completing their development.

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What to look for in May !

Lilac, Laburnum, and Horse-Chestnut in Bloom—Pæonies blazing in the garden. Elder-blossom, and Guelder-Rose blossom—blossom of Mountain-Ash and Service Tree. The Sedge-bird, babbling by a moonlit stream ; Philomel singing, her breast up-till a thorn. Five hundred wild flowers—you may find a thousand different wild flowers in a season in Sussex. The late-comers among birds, still arriving from winter quarters—late Swallows, Martins, Swifts, Turtle-Doves, Red-backed Shrikes, Spotted Fly-catchers, and Nightjars, those companions of the campers, spinning their rattle-songs through the night watches. No moment of the day is without bird-song, and the short May nights are musical with the voices, besides those of the reed-birds and of Philomel, of Grasshopper-Warbler, Cuckoo, Wood-Lark, Owl, etc. " What hath night to do with sleep ? " they ask. As we go home—since we " must a little sleep, love "—our way is lighted by the green lamps of Glow-Worms.

It were easier to write on what *not* to look for in May, and among other things we should put in our list " Birds' nests." Our Log for May contains the following words, written in letters of gold, as originally written in black-and-white by Viscount Grey of Falloden :

" Birds, if they could address us, might well say, ' However kindly your interest and however benevolent your intention, please do not look for our nests.' You will expose them to dangers of which you do not dream and from which you cannot save them."

Lord Grey thinks it very probable that when a human being finds and examines a nest he leaves some track or trace that betrays the treasure—a bent twig or a displaced leaf may catch the keen eye of a hungry Jackdaw looking down from above.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROSE MOON

Crowds of Bees are giddy with clover,
Crowds of Grasshoppers skip at our feet,
Crowds of Larks at their matins hang over,
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet.

JEAN INGELOW.

FOR a picture of June give me a meadow of mowing-grass, flushing with red Sorrel, white with Moon-Daisies, with wild Roses on the hedges, and a Wryneck calling in an Elm-top. In the cool of the evening let there be a Land-Rail croaking in the grasses, or a Sedge-bird babbling by a brook, or a Nightjar reeling, and Ghost-Moths, prinked out in satiny white, swinging over the grasses and flowers in mazy dance.

The essence of June is in the wild Roses. They make up to us for all we lose as Spring passes. My botany-book describes some twenty species, but some are doubtful natives. The one we know and love best has the unworthy title, Common Dog-Rose, and deserves to be re-christened by some such name as Rose of the World. It may be that it was called Dog-Rose because the root was supposed to cure the bite of mad dogs.

June 12th is given as the average date for the flowering of the wild Rose in the British Isles, through five-and-thirty years, by the Royal Meteorological Society's observers. (It may appear in the last week of May.) Those observers give June 3rd as the average date of the Moon-Daisy, and

June 14th for the first appearance of the Meadow Brown Butterfly. A date of special interest is given in their note : " Cuckoo last heard, June 28th—twelve years' average."

But the Moon-Daisy is not called officially by that pleasant name, which it well deserves, as it makes a meadow appear as if covered by miniature fallen moons—officially it is the White Ox-Eye—*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*. It does

not much suggest an ox's eye, and the jumble of its Latin name is no less absurd. As " Chrys " is the Greek for golden, and " Anthos " the Greek for a flower, and " Leukos " for white, the botanical name, interpreted, means gold-flower-white-flower. With its great white rays and golden centre the flower, on its two-foot stem, can hold its own with many garden beauties ; gypsies carry it from the field to be sold in towns. But it is the massed effect of the

flowers, when myriads blow in one field, which fills the eye with delight—anybody's seeing eye, except the farmer's.

This is the month when the Cuckoo changes his tune. A bird in good voice will keep to the same time and the same key as he calls in the young days of Summer, but the interval, often a minor third, is changed as the season wanes. Six or seven times he calls in ten seconds, about forty times in a minute during his eager, early-morning efforts ; he may call upwards of two thousand times in an hour. When excited by hearing the musical, bubbling cry of the female, he throws time and tune to the winds. Watch a Cuckoo calling at close quarters, and you may observe the remarkable fact that the bill is closed. We observe also that two toes are directed forwards as he perches. While calling, the wings are dropped so that they fall below the tail, which is a little elevated, and is spread. The body sways, and may be turned this way and that ; the throat swells as the bird shouts his name to the woods and hills. One Cuckoo will echo another, but the most charming and mysterious effect is when the call rouses its own perfect echo. It is a red-lettered day when we share the fortune of the poet who heard a Cuckoo calling and saw a rainbow at the same moment.

Gilbert White's " Naturalist's Calendar " for June contains nine-and-ninety entries, mainly about the wild flowers. He notes, " Grasshopper appears—Sheep are shorn—Bee-Orchis flowers—Meadow-hay is cut—Lime-tree flowers "—all happy June happenings. Two entries only concern birds : " Quail calls—Young Partridges fly." The triple note of the Quail, a shrill cry suggesting the words " Wet-my-lips," is now rarely heard from the jungles of mowing-grass, but we are sure to hear the calling of Partridges in hay-fields and corn-fields on June evenings, as the parents settle their broods for the night under their wings. Little Partridges run and feed themselves as soon

as they leave the egg-shells, and begin to fly when about a fortnight old. " Perdix—perdix ! " call the devoted parents ; and we might almost be sure it were the month of June from the devotion and anxiety in their voices.

Our Log contains the following amusing story concerning the education of young Partridges :

A newly hatched brood was discovered in the grass by

the roadside ; the father bird had collected nine of the chicks, while the mother was looking in an agitated way for Number Ten, which had strayed away. At last this little rascal came from the grass and ran to his mother—who marched towards him, and gave him deliberately such a sound cuff on the side of his head that he was knocked on his back, with both his tiny legs sticking straight into the air. He soon picked himself up, and walked off meekly

behind his stern parent. Our observer followed the brood, but ventured too near : the parent birds flew into a field about fifty yards distant, but even at that range they still kept perfect control over their well-disciplined family. With much clucking they insisted on absolute silence from the brood, which had been chirping and running in and out of the grass without ceasing. After being warned, they crouched low, turning themselves into statues of squatting baby Partridges. On the observer retreating, the parents seemed to pass the word, " All clear ! " and the chicks at once rushed out of cover, as our observer related, " full of chat."

It is unusual for Partridge parents to fly far from a brood ; their normal plan is to pretend to be hurt, and flutter away from an intruder with trailing wings. The reason of their flight on this occasion may have been that the intruder was seated in a motor-car ; and the Partridges may have thought it would be useless to try to decoy a motor-car to follow them across a field by the trick of distracting attention from the brood by pretending to be wounded—if that be their idea.

The Flycatchers' Nest

Spotted Flycatchers are remarkable for the way they return, in April or in May, year after year, to the same nest-site. June brought us a note which goes to show what an interest the little cock bird takes in the nesting-affairs : On the first day of the month a pair of these fly-fishers were observed paying a great deal of attention to some ivy against a wall, and on the next day they began to carry nesting-material to the site. The cock bird was carrier-in-chief, bringing in dry grasses, which he arranged with his bill. Sitting down on the grasses, he would turn round and round, kicking outwards with his feet, and pressing his breast against the sides. The hen meanwhile would sit on a favourite perch nearby, and watch him at his labours. At

intervals, he would fly up, and strut up and down before her on the roof, fluttering his wings. She did not appear to be particularly interested, nor to throw more than a glance or two in his direction. Through the third and fourth day the cock went on building, and presently he added to his grasses four hen-feathers; these proved to be all brown feathers, though he might have chosen feathers of almost any

colour from a fowl-run. On the fifth day the nest was finished, and on the sixth the hen laid her first egg. The cock was a proud bird that morning, and could hardly tear himself away from the egg, and if he did so quickly returned to look again at his treasure. The hen showed but little interest, and scarcely went near the nest, until at last her clutch was complete, and she began to sit; in due time hatching out her charming brood.

My Blue Titmice

Another nesting-story of June tells of some nestling Titmice which would continually fall out of their nest-hole, though replaced time and again : one would fall out, then seven or eight would follow.

" The youngsters," runs the note, " are very tame, and sit happily on my fingers without attempting to move. They have remarkable clinging-power in their claws. I sit very still, with the little birds on my fingers, and then, after several flutters round, a parent bird alights on my finger, and feeds his hopefuls. The food is a sticky white substance, like the sticky flies you see on the backs of currant-leaves ; other mouthfuls consist of smooth, green caterpillars. The young birds take the food from the parents' beaks : it is not popped down their throats. They flutter their wings when calling for or receiving food."

As the young Titmice, which could not attempt to fly, still continued to fall out of the nest, they were housed in a Canary-cage, and herein the parents fed them until they were strong enough to take to their wings. The parents became so tame that they never hesitated to perch on their human friends' fingers.

Fox-Cubs at Play

One of the prettiest of all our wild-animal pictures is that of Fox-Cubs gambolling in a woodland glade. I copy this note from our midsummer Log :

" Wandering into a coppice, I followed an unused path, with bushes of May and Roses on either side. I had not gone far when I heard a series of short, sharp barks, and soon came upon a sight I shall never forget—eight Fox-Cubs at play, running round and round a tree-trunk like so many kittens. I watched them for some time until I

carelessly made a sound, whereupon they stopped dead in their play, and bolted down into their den, the opening of which is not bigger than a Rabbit's-hole. Many Chicken's-feathers, and remains of Rabbits, strewed the ground.

" One night the mother of these Cubs killed for them five of our chickens, which was most ungrateful after all the interest I have taken in her children."

The Yarn of the Dormouse

The old woodman of the " Wilderness," who had told us that young Squirrels were born in January, was a great friend to our Birch-Bark Roll, and gave us many notes. Many of the birds in the copse are his friends, like the Robins with which he shares his bread and cheese. He says that

the Pheasants always find out where he is working, and that they enjoy his company. A faithful sheep-dog which also keeps him company has no terror for the Pheasants, though it once killed a Stoat, " which," said the woodman, " cost me many a Rabbit." He had looked upon the Stoat as among his friends, for he would often beg from the Stoat a Rabbit which it had killed, and take it home for his own dinner. His sheep-dog had invented a most peculiar game ; it was his delight to nose about and find out the stores of nuts hidden by Dormice in pockets among the roots of trees. The woodman kept a sharp eye open for " Sleepers," or Dormice. He could sell them for eightpence each to a livestock dealer in our market town, though he never did so. He would always find a Dormouse for anybody who wanted one for a pet : hereby hangs this yarn.

" If you please, I've got some young Sleepers for you, down at home," said the old wood-cutter one day. He had found me Sleepers before, curled-up balls of brown fur with little pink fists, like baby hands, tightly clenched in winter sleep, but never *baby* Sleepers. I hurried to his cottage to bring the babies home.

Now the woodman's wife was a most motherly person, plump, rosy-faced, and kindly, and she had had babies of her own ; but give her baby Dormice to tend, and she is utterly lost. It had never occurred to her that mice are mammals, and that milk, watered if need be, is safe diet for baby mammals. " Dormice grind holes in nuts, and eat the kernels," was her one thought ; and—would you believe it ?—it was uncracked nuts which she had been offering to the midget mice !

One of the babies I carried home, wrapped in cotton-wool, and he soon learned to take warm milk from the point of a small paint-brush, holding the soft hairs to his mouth with his tiny, pale-pink hands, and it was not long before he could

feed himself on bread and milk, and minute portions of crushed nuts.

In size and shape he was exactly like a little nut himself—like the round ones found in grocers' shops ; you would have mistaken him for a nut if you did not see his long tail.

It was his delight to run about our dining-room table, but though he sampled many dainties, he scarcely swallowed anything.

I made a little house for him, filled with moss and twigs, and with grass and cotton-wool for a bed, making it look as much like his natural nursery as possible. He liked his bed very well, but it was his joy to run about, quite fearlessly, especially on a table, where his favourite perch was the handle of a cup ; hereon he balanced himself, to sample anything he might be offered. A single grain of granulated sugar was a feast in itself to him, and lasted him a long time.

Now that Dormouse sleeps his winter sleep in a wood-wild nest which he has made for himself. Soon he will be waking, and I like to picture him as the little king of a hazel-bush, in the full glory of mouse estate, soon to be courting and winning a consort who, I hope, will produce many a family of animated nuts for his greater glory. And may my old friend the woodman never find them out, and take them as pets for his missus or me—or be tempted to sell them for eightpence apiece !

CHAPTER VII

THE CORN MOON

For us the winds do blow,
The earth doth rest, heaven move and fountains flow;
Nothing we see but means our good,
As our delight or as our treasure;
The whole is either our cupboard of food,
Or cabinet of pleasure.

George Herbert.

"THEN came hot July boiling like to fire," wrote the poet Spenser, and pictured July with a scythe on his back, and a sickle in his belt. With July and the Dog-Days the midsummer hush falls on the birds, but some little voices which have been lost awhile are heard again, like the twofold call of the Chiffchaff; and bird life is more abundant than at any time of the year. Though in general the time of the clear heat upon the herbs is a silent time, about the corn-fields the Yellow Hammer sings on perpetually and the Greenfinch, which seems to be among the happiest of birds, is for ever musically prattling. Wordsworth's title becomes it well, "Brother of the leaves."

The decorator of our Log reminds us this month of what our eyes may prove, that the flowers of the little Rock-Roses are looking for the sun. Sun-Roses, and Beauties of the Sun, are old names given by country people. In Spring, the leaves are of a tender green, but as Summer goes on they are of a shining, myrtle-like hue. They are true sun-lovers, opening when the sun shines, and closing when he is

sulky. The fragile, pale-gold petals are curiously crumpled, and the stamens are curiously sensitive, recoiling from the touch of a finger, or the wing of an insect.

Another name, claimed by several plants, is that of Lotus, a favourite flower-name with the ancients, borne also by our Bird's-foot Trefoil. Country children call it Lady's-

Slippers, and Shoes-and-Stockings, and Eggs-and-Bacon from its mingled hues suggesting the colour of a poached egg set on bacon. While the flowers are bright yellow, the young buds are often a deep crimson. Like the Rock-Rose, it delights in downs by the sea. On a hot summer afternoon, Lotus seems the fitting name for the Bird's-foot Trefoil if you see it when you are lying at ease on the downs, with one of those hassocks of the Ants, covered by Wild Thyme,

for a cushion, looking out to the sea, and watching the Larks and the Gulls. A poet's lines may come to mind :

> A pleasing land of drowsyhead it was,
> Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye,
> And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,
> For ever flashing round a summer sky.

Lying on our bed of Thyme, day-dreaming, we shall hear the merry music of the Grasshopper, as he fiddles away with his hind leg for a bow and his wing for a string. On the inner surface of the hind leg's thigh is a file, and when this is scraped across the ridge on the outer surface of the front wing, the pleasant chirruping music fills the air. Naturally, a Grasshopper's music is intended to be heard by other Grasshoppers ; and, accordingly, Nature has fitted them with ears, though she has chosen what seems an odd place for the hearing organ—the first segment of the abdomen.

Crickets fiddle in a different way, by rubbing their two front wings together, a file on the under side of one scraping against a ridge on the upper side of the other. The Cricket's ears—like our own, in having a tightly-stretched membrane, the tympanum, and nerves sensitive to sound-waves—are placed on the shin-joints of the first pair of legs.

Turning attention again to the flowers, among the Trefoils we find Black Medick, which also has the quaint name, Nonsuch, and sometimes is called Shamrock ; it is distinguished by its black pods, not enclosed in the calyx as in the Trefoils.

On the chalk hills we see the charming flower with the hideous name, Scabious, signifying leprosy, and enshrining notions that the plant would heal such a disease. A west-country name becomes it better—Gypsy-Rose. Its sweet, grave, mauve face wears a swarthy look.

On old walls, in company with Wallflowers and Snap-

dragons, is the Spur Valerian, so handsome that we doubt if it be truly a wild plant, though now at home in many wild places, like old chalk-pits. In the warm west-country it flowers from April to September. There is honey in its spurs, for the delight of long-tongued insects.

Going down to the sea, we find this month a high ornament of the barren beach in the Yellow Horned Poppy, a

biennial growing so close to the waves that the leaves may be splashed by the spray. It blooms from June till August, a lovesome thing when seen in the dewy morn, with all points of the rough leaves spangled with pearls of dew, and the sickle-like pods waving above the blossoms.

Walking in hayfields in these days, we are greeted by the quaint flower called Yellow-Rattle, from the way the seeds rattle in their cases. A strong wind will set them rattling

—an old sign to Swedish farmers that their meadow-grass is ripe for haymaking. The botanic name means Cock's-comb, and is explained by a glance at our decorator's sketch. Yellow-Rattle is a sign of poor land. We may often make a guess at the nature of a soil by its flowers and trees ; Beeches thrive on chalk, Pines suggest sand, Willows tell a tale of water.

Salad Burnet figures too in our calendar, a curious plant with leaves which taste like cucumber, in olden days much esteemed in salads. When the pistil-bearing blossoms open, the crimson styles make the flower look like a paint-brush. Later, the lower stamen-bearing flowers expand, with long filaments hanging. The old herbalists prized this plant, and would infuse it in the beverages they called "cool tankards." The herbalist, Culpeper, described it as a most precious herb, and remarked that its continual use would keep a body in good health, and the spirits in vigour. If the sun be the preserver of life, he remarked, then, under God, the sun's herbs are the best medicine in the world, to give us strength and make our hearts merry. It is remarkable how few herbs of ancient repute still retain an official position in medicine, gained by inclusion in the British Pharmacopœia issued by the General Medical Council —the number has dwindled to about four-and-twenty species.

Salad Burnet belongs to the bountiful Rose-tribe, of which a higher ornament also appears in our calendar, the white or trailing Dog-Rose, known from all our other species of native Roses by its slender, trailing stems, a common Rose of woods and hedges of the South of England. This may be the famous white Rose worn in the wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster. Roses were few in those days. A sixteenth-century herbalist described all the garden Roses of his day, and they numbered no more than twelve. It is often lamented that new fashionable

kinds have lost something in beauty of shape and colour, and much in scent. And yet—

> And yet—I love thee best,
> Whether about my thatch thou twine,
> Or Hers, that brown-eyed maid of mine,
> Who lulls thee on her lawny breast,
> O royal Rose!

Wild Raspberries

Some of the great valleys of the South Downs now offer plentiful feasts of Wild Raspberries to the children, and to the birds which dine after them on the delicious fruit. So in parts of Canada, a traveller tells us, the children revel in Wild Raspberries, and the traveller describes how hundreds of acres are covered by Raspberries on the shores of a lake named Stony Lake, where the banks are formed of masses

of limestone, on which brilliant Tiger-Lilies display their magnificence. "It was here where we used to come annually in large picnic parties to collect this valuable fruit for our winter preserves, in defiance of black Flies, Mosquitoes, Snakes, and even Bears, all of which have been encountered by berry-pickers upon this spot, as busy and active as themselves gathering an ample repast from Nature's bounteous lap."

No such rivals interfere with the happy children who pick Raspberries on the Sussex Downs near Storrington, though it is true they might encounter an Adder. But our British Adders do not eat Raspberries, like the Canadian Snakes—if we believe the traveller's tale above quoted.

A Marsh-Lover

Our Calendar portrays also a second nest of the summer as built by a pair of Reed-Buntings, sometimes called Black-headed Buntings, or Reed-Sparrows—lovers of marshes. They believe in early nesting, and may start building in March. (The Black-headed Bunting proper is a bird of south-eastern Europe, very rare in this country.) Our British Bunting builds a nest of grasses, flags, and moss, lined with hair or reed-flowers, a dainty cradle for the handsome, purple-blotched eggs. This Bunting is the lowliest member of the reed-bed's choir, uttering but three or four notes as it clings to a swaying reed. The cock cuts a fine figure with his black cap and white collar, and is a model mate, sharing his hen's labours.

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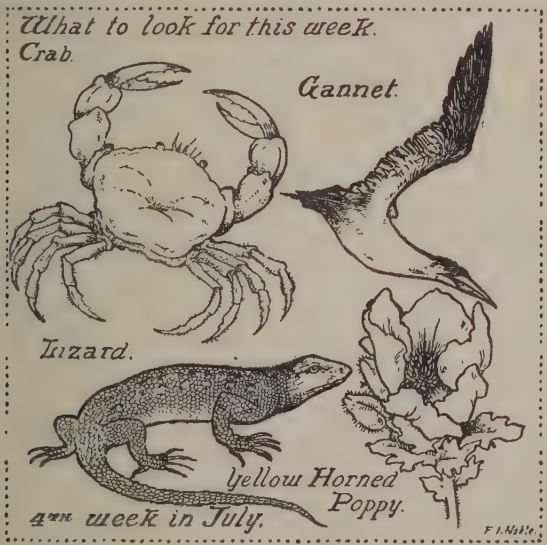
For the last week of the month our calendar bids us consider the Crab, and sends our thoughts soaring and diving with the Gannet.

Of Crabs, there are many thousands of species, all beginning life on the surface of the water as free swimmers, Shrimp-like atoms which grow and change shells and go on

growing and changing shells until at last they grow up, tuck in their tails, and prepare to spend their lives in crannies in rocks, or in the darkness below the sands.

The Crab which interests us most is the Common Hermit, which devotes the greater part of its life to solving the housing problem, for the reason that Nature has seen fit to leave its tender stomach without any armour. Therefore he



seeks safety from voracious fish within the empty shell of a Trochus, a Whelk, or a Winkle. Should he fancy a shell which is inhabited, he may eat the tenant and proceed to occupy his castle. Should he outgrow his home, he must seek a new one, whereupon he examines scores and hundreds of shells, maybe to find a good fit, fighting any Crab he meets which is likewise house-hunting.

Then the familiar story runs on to tell of the strangest partnership in all the book of Nature—how the home of

the Hermit Crab is often shared by a Sea-Anemone. This Anemone lives on the food which drops from the Crab's jaws, its fee for protecting its host from his enemies, for a fish will not face the stinging tentacles. The hungry Cod which gladly would swallow the Crab and his Whelk-shell castle too, sheers off when he sees the Anemone on guard. Such is the story in brief outline, but there is more to tell and more to find out than ever has been told, as we study the life of the rock-pools, those oceans in miniature.

At all seasons Gannets are found among most of our coasts, except when nesting, when they gather at a few northern stations, like the Bass Rock, the Shetlands, and off the Welsh and Irish coasts. The Gannet is called the Solan Goose because of its Goose-like size ; it measures about a yard in length. The young of the first year wear a dark, speckled plumage, which changes as years go on to the snowy-white and black-tipped wings of the full-grown bird of about six years. The way of the Gannet differs from that of other bird-fishers. Cruising above the sea on wandering flight, it follows the shoals of fish, then rises for the dive, and plunges to water with wings partly open, but folded as the water is struck with force enough to drive up a shower of spray visible a mile away. For a few seconds the diver is lost to view, then reappears with a fish in its strong, spear-like beak, to wheel again above the water.

The Lizard figuring in our calendar is notable as the one reptile found in Ireland, since St. Patrick banished all others—a haunter of downs and commons, at this time of year seen in different sizes, and in many different colours, according to age, climate, food, light, locality, sex, temperature, and other factors. The male of the Common Lizard measures about six inches ; the female is larger. They are wonderfully fleet, especially when Adders are on their trail.

This month, Swifts begin to leave us for coasts which keep the sun, indeed, we may see our last Swift of summer before

August comes. House-Martins are still rearing fresh broods. They may stay with us even until December. Swallows congregate : telling how soon Summer will pass on their fleet wings. Cuckoos also depart, the old birds going first, and leaving their young to follow as best they may.

The reaping of the corn deprives a multitude of creatures of their earthly paradise, of their " cupboard of food," and " cabinet of pleasure "—Pheasants, Partridges, Land-Rails, Rabbits, Hares, Hedgehogs, Rats, Mice, the Fox, and perhaps the Badger. Rooks march and countermarch across shorn fields of corn or grass, finding nests of Mice or Voles. Fox-cubs now begin to forage for themselves.

July is the month of Butterflies. Where they cut the Oats the humble Gatekeeper flits about on zigzag flight, and settles on gate or wall, and now the Harvest Butterfly, the Gorgeous Peacock, is airing its velvety wings. The Comma appears, unlike any British Butterfly with its scalloped wings, and their sign of the comma painted in white. It is the month for the heavenly Blue Butterflies ; for the Swallow-tail of the Fens ; and in town as well as in country for the lordly Red Admiral. Brimstones are abundant, and Fritillaries appear on their golden-brown chequered wings. Among others we look for the various Whites, the Tortoise-shells, the Meadow Browns, Graylings, the Heaths, the White Admiral, the Purple Emperor, the Painted Lady, the Small Copper and the Hairstreaks.

On the high downs by the sea a sort of second spring comes with the blossoming of the Heather and late Honeysuckle, and the appearance of many late flowers, among them Harebell, Milkwort, Squinancy-wort, Tormentil, Cathartic Flax, Dropwort, Hawkweed, Self-Heal, and Feverfew.

Poppies flame in the corn.

Willow-herb flowers on river-banks, Meadow-Sweet is in its prime, and masses of Purple Loosestrife stain the banks in purple flowers to make us feel at peace.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HARVEST MOON

Under the greenwood tree-he-he,
Who loves to lie with me-he-he,
And toon his merry note-ote-ote,
Unto the sweet bird's throat-ote-ote,
Come hither, come hither, come hither.

SEA, sky, and down—those words will form for many of us an ideal for the chapter of the year now reached, words which made the title of an essay by Richard Jefferies, who was living in Brighton in the eighties of the last century, with sea, sky, and down before, behind, and overhead. This philosopher taught that while many people live out their lives in the Reading Room of the British Museum, acquiring knowledge, they are yet nearer to wisdom and understanding when they go out from beneath the gloom of the vast dome sheltering the world's books, on to the portico under the great columns, and look up to the luminous southern blue sky; and so are the Pigeons of the portico, which have been in the sunlight since the days of Adam. How much nearer should they be to wisdom and understanding on the South Downs?

Out on those hills we shall see and hear to-day much that Jefferies saw—the sweet smooth curves of greensward, the steep escarpments, the flower-embroidered turf, the little blue Butterflies; the golden Gorse, the royal purple Heather, the fragrant Wild Thyme; the wild Roses and the wild Honeysuckles wreathing the old May-bushes;

the combes and vales and clear-cut crest-lines ; ancient earth-works ; music of the wind in the bents, of the Sky-Larks aloft ; little hamlets lost in the folds of the hills and little lost churches—Badgers, Foxes, Rabbits, windmills, dew-ponds, shepherds, sheep, and sheep-bells.

Climbing to the highest beacon, and looking out over the vast blue map of the Weald, a thousand square miles of

loveliness, we want to shout " Ha ! Ha ! " to the gates of the world.

Often Richard Jefferies would watch a Kestrel hovering in a field between Brighton and Hove, and he watched a party of Rooks clumsily driving at the graceful form. One Kestrel he saw daily for weeks together hovering over the town on the same beat, sometimes even perching on a chimney. One day he saw a Weasel crossing a road in Hove.

He loved to watch the Sea-gulls, and the Rooks which still nest every year in the Royal Pavilion's grounds. Out on the Downs he marked the little Wheatears, and the handsome little Stonechat, the brightest bird of the hills in winter. He listened to a Meadow-Pipit singing as it soared above the Dyke Road, as we may hear the bird on every hand. No Thrush could sing in the town, no Blackbird or happy Finch, without a thought of the song and its message entering his mind. He taught that in the sunshine, by the shady verge of woods, by waters where the wild Dove sips—there alone thought will be found. On the Downs one day he heard a Cuckoo calling against the wind from a wood in the Weald below at a mile's distance: "The wind threw back the ringing notes, but every now and then, as the breeze ebbed, they came, having travelled a full mile against the current of air. There is no bird with so powerful a voice as the Cuckoo; his cry can be heard almost as far as a clarion."

Following his footsteps over the old hills and far away, even to Ditchling Beacon, the highest promontory of that part of the range, we shall echo his words, "Hope dwells there, in the breeze, in the sward, or the pale cups of the Harebells."

Hope, Wisdom, and Understanding.

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Our illustrated calendar reminds us this month of many pleasant things; harvest fields and Harvest Mice; Devonshire lanes where Hart's-Tongues grow on the stone hedges; cottage gardens with clumps of golden-flowered Tansy; quiet glades where Rabbits are at play; Sea-Birds, Sea-Weeds, and Sea-Shells; and Wild Ducks about to begin their courting season

By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

The Pochard's portrait is presented. This favourite duck has increased much of late, and now nests regularly in places where it was known but as a winter visitor of old. In autumn, large numbers come to us from the Continent. This duck is a lover of fresh water, delighting in quiet lakes with beds of reeds. It feeds by day and night, and is remarkably vigilant. It is a great favourite with London children,

who, marking its chestnut head as it sails on the park ponds, hail it as Copper-nob, while the sober-hued female has the name, Dunbird. Copper-nob always looks spruce in a dove-coloured cloak, with waved pencillings, and neck-scarf of deep brownish-black; the shining head is of chestnut-brown. Such water-fowl in town parks brighten drab autumn days by their habit of putting on gay wedding garments long before Winter.

Like some ducks and gulls, the Oyster-Catcher is a bird both of land and sea, often nesting far inland ; it is one of the most restless of seashore birds, shy and wary and always in a hurry. When at sea, it swims and dives well. At this season, as the young grow strong, the parents take them to the mouths of rivers. Sea-worms and slugs make up their main diet. An Irish name, Mussel-Picker, is appropriate ; and the bird is known also as Sea-Pie, which suits it well, and it makes a beautiful study in its black-and-white plumage as it flits low over the water.

A story in our Log shows that the Oyster-Catcher, though so shy a bird, may be tamed, and will even learn to trust a human friend so completely as to appeal to one for help in time of trouble.

It is not unusual, though always very touching when it happens, for wild birds to seek out human society when in distress. I have a story of how a Kingfisher, pursued by a Sparrow-Hawk, once flew across a Cornish bay, to come to rest at my feet for protection. I drove off the Hawk ; and then a Sea-gull, like a white avenging angel, swooped at its sinister form, and after a long chase, up wind and down wind, over the sea, succeeded in driving it over the cliff-top.

Our story is of an Oyster-Catcher which has returned year after year to an East-coast bird-sanctuary, to nest in the same place. The bird-watcher lived on a house-boat, and every morning, the first time he came on deck, the Oyster-Catcher would fly towards him, and settle on the beach nearby : as the bird-watcher says, " He'd kind of talk to me, and I'd kind of talk to him, just in a way of our own."

One day, as the bird-watcher was talking to a friend on deck, the male Oyster-Catcher came wheeling round and round their heads with loud cries.

" I'll lay there's something wrong with the old chap's nest," said his friend. " We'll see."

Sure enough, when they reached the nest, they espied

the female bird standing disconsolately at a distance, and found that the eggs had been washed out of the nest by an unusually high tide. They put the eggs back, and then both birds were content. The eggs took no harm, and hatched successfully.

When in Cornwall I have seen a human Oyster-catcher—a fisherman—take a Starfish from his dredging-net, and,

since Starfish are deadly enemies of the Oysters, tear it to pieces, and fling the pieces back to the sea—not knowing that each separate piece would in time become a perfect Starfish, ready to play him a return match. Many invertebrates have this marvellous power of repairing and regenerating their lost parts. Starfish usually have five arms and a central mouth. They are a wandering tribe, and propel themselves by hydraulic power. The under-surfaces of

the creatures are beset by hundreds of small tubes, each with a circular sucking-disc at its tip. Water, taken in by a tube about the mouth, is pumped into the tubes, which then shoot out, and grip whatever object is touched. Then the water is shut off, and goes to other tubes, and so in turn these strange feet come into play, and the Starfish goes gliding along, seeking maybe a tasty shellfish for its supper.

The Sea Urchin has a family connection with the Starfishes. This is clear if we look beneath the spines which cover it, for the form then suggests that of a Starfish whose arms have been turned backwards so that their tips meet, the space between the arms being filled by a substance of the same material. The beautifully-fashioned spines are set in ball-and-socket joints, and so have fairly free play when the tube-like feet are set in motion. The Urchin has a central mouth like the Starfish, a wonderful apparatus. Five teeth will be found within, all pointing to the centre of the mouth, and set in wedge-shaped jaws. The text-book says that no fewer than thirty distinct muscles operate this mouth. The arrangement of the teeth, muscle, ligaments, and bone scaffolding is so complicated that it must be seen to be believed, and words convey little idea of how it works.

Like the Starfish, Urchins usually inhabit deep water, where they may exist in enormous numbers, feeding on animal and vegetable diet. On the Continent they are esteemed as table delicacies—after the spines have been removed. The Edible Urchin is a common British species—but I have never known anyone who has tried eating one in this country.

A Goodly Company

In the goodly company of the wild flowers of August ranks Traveller's-joy, whose star-like flowers now open in

chalky lanes which climb the hills. For its pleasant name we are indebted to the Elizabethan herbalist, John Gerard. "The Traveller's-joy," he wrote, "is found in the borders of fields, among thorns and briers, almost in every hedge. It is commonly called *Viorna*, of decking and adorning ways and hedges where people travel; and thereupon I have named it the Traveller's-joy." He added, that the

plants had no use in physic, but are esteemed only for pleasure, by reason of the goodly shadow which they make, as also for the beauty of the flowers, and the pleasant savour of the same." Little could he have thought, when penning those simple lines, how they would be remembered after hundreds of years by people who travel by lanes and hedges, and would connect the creeper for all time with his name.

Rambling also over hedgerows is the Wild Hop, a graceful

climber with its Vine-like leaves and clusters of yellow catkins. Examined closely, small glands will be observed, and will be found to have a volatile oil, the famous tonic to which the scent is due. Hop-tea is still brewed by country housewives, some of whom also place their faith in pillows stuffed with freshly-dried Hops, as a cure for sleeplessness.

There is an old saying, that Hops, Turkeys, Carp, and beer came into England all in one year. That year is supposed to have been 1524, but beer was known in darker ages still, and Hops are doubtless as true natives in the south of England as were the early Britons. It was a common idea in Queen Bess's time that beverages brewed with Hops made people melancholy, but a sixteenth-century writer thus pleaded for the Hop, or, as he said, exalted it :

> The Hop for his profit I thus do exalt,
> It strengtheneth drink, and it favoureth malt ;
> And being well brewed, long kept it will last,
> And drawing abide—*if ye draw not too fast.*

The male and the female flowers of the Hop are found on separate plants ; the little flowers of the male in loose sprays, the others in spikes, each pair having a scale below, the flower having a sepal and a pistil ; the scales enlarge and are yellow in the fruiting-time.

Another good old English flower, which often has strayed away from cottage gardens to illuminate old lanes passing houses, is Tansy, with blossoms which suggest golden buttons. It gives out an aromatic odour, and its leaves are very decorative. In the old days Tansy-cakes were commonly made of the young leaves, mixed with eggs. It is a pity that Tansy-pudding has gone out of fashion. The name is from the word " athanasia," meaning immortal, as the flowers may be preserved a long time.

The fronds of Hart's-Tongue are immortal, too, being evergreen. Strap-shaped, or like a deer's tongue, they

are very different from the feathery ferns. They come to perfection this month, remaining green all the winter. The fern delights in shady banks, the clefts of old rocks, and old buildings. The fronds arch from the centre, suggesting the long feathers of a cock's tail. In Devonshire lanes, they may be three feet long, but sometimes on old walls they grow no longer than one or two inches. Old writers tell strange stories about Hart's-Tongue, as that a decoction of the leaves is " very good against the passions of the heart."

Rebuilding the Nest

We had a note in the Log one day about a pair of Rooks which pulled their own nest to pieces, and rebuilt it " nearer to the heart's desire." This brought a remarkable yarn about a pair of Chaffinches which destroyed and rebuilt their exquisite cradle.

The nest was built in the fork of a Pear-tree. The building took a long time ; it was nearly a month before the last bit of lichen was stuck in place, and the hen was sitting on her eggs. Then she decided that after all the site would not suit. Though she had been sitting for two days, she began to pull the nest to pieces, and to rebuild it about a yard farther along the same branch. The most wonderful part of the story is yet to come—somehow or another she managed to move her eggs—or so it seemed—to the new nest. On a Monday night there were eggs resting on the remains of the old nest, and it looked as though they might be blown off at any moment. On Tuesday morning there were eggs —apparently the same ones—in the new nest.

Birds do occasionally move eggs. Starlings carry eggs from their nests in their bills, and often drop them on lawns —a mysterious habit. A strange story to the point is about a Cuckoo which actually laid two eggs on the ground (I can personally vouch for the truth of this yarn). An Orchid-

hunter was crawling on hands and knees in a dense part of a wood when he observed the eggs, and the Cuckoo, and turned himself into a statue. But the bird was aware of his presence. She gathered an egg between her neck and her throat, and flew off with it ; returned shortly, and gathered the second egg in the same way, flew off, and was no more seen.

Then we had a good, true story of two Pigeons which built a nest by the window of an office in the City of London. Soon after the two eggs hatched, one of the young ones fell out of the apology of a nest, and was discovered on a niche below. The mother Pigeon became very agitated, but no amount of persuasion or forcible argument could make her chick move. Then she was inspired by a bright idea ; she actually built another nest round her wayward offspring, and fed it, as regularly as she fed her other hopeful, in its new cradle.

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An August Robin note ran : " On August 10th I heard a Robin singing his farewell to summer. He is always the first to tell us of the approach of Autumn. ' Sounds like the back-end,' say old country-folk."

CHAPTER IX

THE APPLE MOON

Away, away from men and towns,
To the wild wood and the downs,
To the silent wilderness.

HINTS of Autumn's near presence now appear in our Log. Wild Roses have given away to the crimson urns of their seed-vessels; cider-making days set in; silken threads of Gossamer-Spiders float in the air; the Red Admiral butterfly feasts at the sign of the Michaelmas Daisy. "And gathering Swallows twitter in the skies," and soon will be following the Swifts overseas. Nearly all the Warblers begin to desert us. Immense flocks of Starlings, myriads flying as one, are seen, as of Lapwings. Finches gather into flocks, singing as they fly. Autumn fires begin to illuminate woods and hedgerows.

Our Log's decorator bids us listen to the Sky-Lark's song in the first week in September; and indeed we may listen to this blithe spirit in almost any week of the year, for no bird gives us fuller measure of song. The poet was justified in his line, "his voice is heard, though body there is none," for the Lark soars until he is invisible, "melting in the flood of light." His life seems one long hymn of gladness, and "Excelsior" is his motto.

Though the Lark's song may endure but for three or four minutes, the soaring and singing make up a marvellous feat of endurance. The upward flight is not like the easy soaring with motionless wings of a Kestrel or an Eagle. The wings beat continuously as the bird fights its way to the

clouds, and all the while it is pouring forth its aerial music, the notes keeping time with the beating of the wings. Hardy, too, must be the Lark, living always in the open, roosting on the ground, though in winter its bed may be in a bog or in a marsh frozen as hard as iron.

By now the Lark has reared his second brood. He is a devoted father, as he is the most gallant of courtiers. It is

amusing to see with what spirit he dances attendance on his mate, how he raises his crest, and breaks out of his usual gait, a walk or a run with alternate steps. Now and then, expanding one wing, he playfully flicks at his hen, as if by the sign of this touch he claims her for his own. The Lark's name is a contraction of "lavrock," which some say means "a crafty worker," and points to some forgotten superstition in which the Lark figured as a bird of ill-omen. It is best forgotten. The Lark we associate with everything

which is joyous, with blue sky, sunshine, the open hills, and aerial music.

A note in our Log this month ran : " Never do Brown Owls hoot more vigorously or melodiously than at the dawn of autumn. It is a companionable sound to the benighted travellers through woodland ways. Gilbert White of Selborne remarked that Brown Owls hoot in B flat." This

brought us an amusing note from one of our observers, clever at imitating the voices of the Owls, which I here transcribe :

" Finding myself in a lonely lane as darkness was falling, I thought I would call up a Little Owl. Immediately after I had uttered his usual cry, a high-pitched, nasal ' Wiou ! ' I obtained an answer ; echoing cries came nearer, and a Little Owl then flew into a Hawthorn some thirty yards distant.

He kept calling and I kept replying, until suddenly he began to swear! His bad language sounded like the Mistle-Thrush's rattle.

"Motionless, I kept on calling, till curiosity overcame him, and he flew into a tree just behind me, where he kept up a steady conversation for some minutes. Then he flew to the tree above me, and settled above my head. Here he began to utter a new cry, a curious and weird rising call—'Mew-achach!' is the nearest approach to words in which I can express it. I ventured to imitate it, and apparently my poor effort satisfied him, for he continued calling, each time more fervently. Occasionally he would even revert to the previous call; still I imitated him, and thus we kept up a conversation for five minutes.

"Then his cries became less frequent. Perhaps he thought that any sensible lady Owl would have joined him after so many preliminaries. Two other Owls were now replying and coming nearer, but as my throat was aching, and I was shivering with cold, I did not encourage them to exchange ideas!"

. . . . . .

Our Log reminds us that we have reached the days of Blackberry-puddings. We look upon our Blackberries as a pleasant little wayside fruit, but in New Zealand they are regarded rather as a plague, since the brambles cover thousands of acres of what should be rich arable land. Our own farmers also view brambles in hedges with some distrust, as they strangle more valuable plants, though they also protect more delicate ones, and form a useful palisade. Many uses have been found for the tough shoots, from binding down the cottage roof, to binding the sods of graves. The young shoots, when treated with salts of iron, yield a black dye, and some still go into the dyeing vats of those weavers who practise the old art of weaving on hand-looms,

and use vegetable dyes. Many birds delight in Blackberries, notably Pheasants, which will wander down miles of hedgerows in quest of the fruit. Pheasants also are devoted to those engaging insects, Daddy Longlegs, and do good work in eating them, for the larvæ of the Daddies feed on the roots of plants, and are among the many scourges of our farmer's lands. And it is perhaps to the credit of Wasps

that among other good deeds to humanity they help to keep down the swarms of Daddies : witness this story from our Log :

" Up and down the window-pane, and across the kitchen-table, a battle-royal was being waged between a Wasp and a Daddy Longlegs. For awhile it seemed that Daddy must win, but after a time its efforts grew weaker, and at last ceased. I suppose it had been stung. The Wasp proceeded

to bite off its wings and legs, which fell on to the kitchen table ; and then flew away with poor Daddy's body."

Whatever its crimes as a grub, the perfect insect is rather a favourite, with its stilt-like legs, though we wish it would not come blundering in its awkward way into our reading-lamps.

A few wild flowers belong especially to September, among them the Meadow Saffron. At the time of flowering the Crocus of autumn displays no leaves, and on this account the flowers have earned the quaint name, Naked Ladies. The brown bulb has a sheath of brown scales, enclosing the base of the flower, whose long tube rises to three or four inches above the ground, with six long segments of purple hue, sometimes white. Soon after flowering, the leaves appear. The flower is remarkable in that its ovary is underground. When the leaves come the capsule is then raised to the surface of the ground by the lengthening of the peduncle. Thus arising on a fruit-stalk in the springtime, the seeds ripen above the surface, while green leaves stand around them in guardianship. This is among the strangest stories in our British flora.

After the spring and summer flowers have passed through the woods, the Thistles and Teazels take possession. The Teazel bears the name, Dipsacus, a Greek title meaning " the thirsty one." It was suggested by the way the great leaves, united at their base, form cups which hold half a pint of clear liquid, a death-trap to insects. This liquid is not rain or dew which the cups have caught and held, but is drawn from the plant itself. Some think the trapped insects make a sort of broth which nourishes the plant, but proof is lacking. Another idea is that the water is a sovereign remedy for freckles on the face, hence an old name, Venus's-bath. The Teazel rears itself six feet high, and so has been called the Shepherd's-staff. This tall, stout biennial succeeds well in a hard world. Hundreds stand together in serried ranks in the woods where there were Primroses in

April. They are well armed with their formidable prickles on the stems, leaves, and flower-heads. The heads lend themselves to the making of what are called hygrometers; hang one in the house, and it will foretell rain by closing its prickles.

Another sign of the passing of Summer into Autumn is the sight of Humble-Bees, Wasps, Flies, and others taking

their last sips of life's honey at the hospitable tavern of the Ivy. Here we may distinguish the Drone Wasps from the Workers; not so large as the Queens, they are larger than the Workers, and they have longer, thinner bodies, and longer antennæ than those either of Queens or Workers; and their antennæ have thirteen joints, whereas those of the others have twelve. The Drones may safely be taken in the hand, since they are stingless and harmless.

Birds Which Sham Death

A pleasant yarn in our Log this month tells of a little Titmouse which has developed to perfection the art of lying low and saying nothing when danger threatens. Usually, if you disturb a Titmouse sitting in her nest in some hole in a tree, you are greeted by so loud and sudden a hissing noise as might make you think there were a snake within. But the little Titmouse of this story is better behaved than to hiss at a friend : she simply pretends to take no notice.

Some birds, and some animals, are past-masters at shamming death. I have known a Weasel to do so when caught by a cat ; the moment the cat was persuaded to let it go, its limp form sprang to life, and it flashed away before the cat thought of pouncing. A Fox which was bolted from an earth by a terrier, was caught in the noose of a Huntsman's whip, shammed death until the noose was loosened, then was seen as a streak of disappearing red fur. A Rabbit will crouch on the ground, motionless for minutes. A Wryneck will pretend to swoon if taken in hand—as will the Land-Rail ; and a mother Wild Duck will lie down as if dead to distract attention from her brood. Stories also tell of Woodcock which have been picked up for dead, and then have come miraculously to life, even after being stuffed into a game-bag. Here follows the Titmouse yarn :

" Every year a Blue Titmouse builds a nest in an old pump in our garden. One day I lifted the wooden lid from the top of the pump to see if she were there as usual. She was sitting ; and I prepared very quietly to replace the lid when suddenly, from all around her, shot up four little red gaping mouths.

" I was reminded of an old-fashioned posy—the gay, beautiful colours of the mother-bird making the flat centre of the posy, with a border of little red rose-buds.

" The Titmouse seemed to resent a visitor so little that

on the next day I looked again. This time she was on the side of the nest, and seemed to be in a very strange position. I feared lest the handle of the pump had moved, and she might be hurt. I put my hand down and touched her. The nestlings opened eager mouths, but still she did not move. I then lifted her into a different position, and she made a

curious sound: instantly, every one of the chicks shut its mouth, and all crouched low in the nest. I now saw that the mother's eyes were open, and looked round and bright, though she did not move at all.

"She was playing possum! I gently replaced the lid of the pump and stood aside. In a few minutes, Mrs. Tit flew out at the opening of the handle."

Nests in Scare-Crows

Birds will sometimes make friends with scare-crows. One note in our Log this month was of a Blue-Titmouse which took a fancy to a terrible-looking scare-crow, hanging from a cherry-tree, dressed in an old top hat, a long coat with flying tails, and trousers tied round the ankles. The bird found a rent in one knee, and through this went in and out to build its nest among the straw, where it safely reared its brood. This nest was in an allotment, where the scare-crow had been set up to keep birds from the cherries and peas. The gardeners were nervous about the Tits, which are fond of peas—still, they left the nest in peace, and the birds reared their family.

In the hat of another scare-crow, a Robin's nest was found. The man of straw is the man after a bird's heart.

Otters at Play

A pretty story about Otters came to our Log this month from one of our very best observers :

" One evening by the river I heard a fluty whistle, like a water-bird's. Then in the smooth moonlit water a dark bullet-shaped head appeared, and glided towards an island in mid-stream, and a dark lithe body drew itself up on the bank : an Otter. Other heads followed, cleaving the water without a ripple, and three smaller Otters appeared on the island. Then began a strange game played in silence, but with evident enjoyment by all four. They rolled and tumbled over each other in and out of the water, sometimes sliding, sometimes turning head-over-heels, but never making a sound beyond a faint ' plop ' as they hit the surface. Now and again they vanished for a long chase under water, while I watched the silvery surface for the first sign of a dark head. At last there came the eerie whistle again—the play was over, and the Otters had vanished."

CHAPTER X

THE NUT MOON

Will you come to my mountain home, love,
Will you come to the hills with me ?
In the woods we will roam, love,
With our spirits blythe and free.

OCTOBER, Month of Nuts, is one of the best-loved months of the year, ranking third or fourth in favour, even first in some eyes. It must be the merriest month to the Squirrel. His family cares are nearly over. Nuts are now sweet and ripe, and so we find him in a holiday mood, frisking and frolicking in the Beech-woods. If October did not bring us a picture of a Squirrel sitting on his haunches nibbling a nut, we should feel we had lost a rightful pleasure of the month—as if April were to come without a Cuckoo.

Autumn, sings a poet, is the Sabbath of the year. And it is the year's sunset. Splashes of palest gold now lighten the sombre foliage of the Elms ; Beeches turn copper and fox-red ; the Wild Cherry's leaves light up the woodlands as with fire ; Field-Maples illuminate every hedgerow, and the Birch, Lady of the Woods, dons her pale gold dress. Berries of jet, ruby, and crystal, remind one of the fabulous garden where trees bore jewels.

Our summer bird visitors fast slip away to coasts that keep the sun, and our winter guests are expected. A few of those departing sing us a farewell song, after a long silence, and after passing the trying days of the moult. The little Chiffchaff gives a sorry echo of Spring.

Among the earliest winter guests is Jack Snipe ; he comes at this time to stay until April, when he is impelled to fly far north to nest in some swamp within the Arctic Circle. While with us in winter, he seeks rush-covered marshes, and having once chosen his haunt, remains wonderfully faithful to the place, and returns to it year after year. If flushed, he dashes off on a short, swift flight, very soon pitching ; but sometimes he sits so closely as to allow himself to be picked up by a dog.

Vast flocks of incoming migrants now strike our eastern shores, of Fieldfares and Redwings from Scandinavia, Woodcock, Snipe, Duck, and Geese in variety ; Linnets, Skylarks, Goldcrests, Starlings, and many others.

Our calendar presents the portrait of the little Siskin, which is best known as a winter visitor, though it nests in some parts ; from its black and lemon hues, and from being best-known in Scotland, it is sometimes called Scotch Canary.

The Robin proclaims himself minstrel-in-chief of woods, gardens, and lanes, with a song for the field-labourer as he goes to work, and a song for the setting sun. There is a pensiveness in his notes : he sings of the falling leaves. Now and then, for Summer's sake, he heaves a sorrowful sort of musical sigh, reminding us of the lady in the old ballad, who made her sighs to sing.

Hawk-Moths

Hawk-Moths in a room cause a flutter among nervous females as surely as the advent of a Bat. There are some uncanny points about these largest and handsomest of our Moths. The Death's-Head is regarded with awe from its skull-like markings, and its unique power of uttering a squeak. The Humming-Bird Hawk looks like some fantastic creature of another world ; curious tufts of hair fringing the body suggest a bird's spread tail, and the wings beat so

swiftly as to invest the form with a kind of halo. They make a drumming noise like a fairy aeroplane. The Bee-Hawks resemble bees, and may gain some advantage by being dreaded in consequence.

These Moths are of the tribe named *Sphinges* because the Caterpillars have a fancied resemblance to the Egyptian Sphinx. Among the best-known Caterpillars are those of the

Privet-Hawk, abundant on Privet hedges even in the hearts of towns. As they rest on topmost twigs their green tints match the leaves, and untrained eyes pass them over unseeingly. The clue to their presence is the discovery of twigs stripped of leaves. From the end of August till the following June the chrysalides may be discovered in the earth under Privet and Lilac bushes, chrysalides in which sleep the spirits of the lovely Moths, awaiting the days of Roses. The

Moths are decorated in quiet tones of buff and pink, and the splendid wings measure four and a half inches from tip to tip.

A few late Butterflies remain on the wing, and those which hibernate, appearing on mild and sunny days ; we may see the Brimstone, Clouded Yellow, Comma, Tortoiseshells, Peacock, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Copper, and a few late Blues. Many Moths are abroad at night, or may be found on palings or tree-trunks by day ; our calendar illustrates one of several which have the name Chestnut, a Moth very familiar in October and November ; it sleeps through the winter, appearing again in the days of White Violets.

. . . . . .

The sketch of a young Otter in our calendar conjures pleasant memories of river scenes in twilight hours, when the silence is broken by a peculiar whistle, the call of the Otter to her young. It carries a message also to the Trout, which may have been rising freely for flies, but now dive to cover. The swimming of the Otter is the perfection of grace. It can enter the water without splash or ripple, sliding in noiselessly, but it loves a lively frolic, and sometimes one may chance to see two or three rolling and diving, twisting, turning, wrestling, playfully catching-as-catch-can, kissing and biting. It is strange to think that this animal, so perfectly at home in the water, is a land hunter which has taken to fishing, and is allied to Stoat, Weasel, and Badger.

Shreds and tatters of summer's flower-show include Harebell, Knapweed, Betony, Wild Thyme, and Mints ; and the Ivy's blossoms offer a last feast to the insects. Snails seek winter quarters among the Ivy-leaves.

The Harvest-Mouse

A young lady—a very young one—contributed to our Log this month a sketch of a nest she had found among

growing stems of corn, and described it as a Mouse's nest. Her discovery would have marked the day in red letters, and made it memorable for life, for many naturalists, but so little did our contributor appreciate what she had found that she gave the Mouse no proper name. She does not know, perhaps, that we have three British species of what are called true Mice—the Harvest-Mouse, the House-Mouse,

and the Long-tailed Field-Mouse. We have also three Shrew-Mice: Pygmy, Common, and Water. We have the Dormouse, and the Mice sometimes called Voles, like the Common Meadow-Mouse (Short-tailed Field-Mouse or Field-Vole) and the Red-Backed Meadow-Mouse (Red or Bank Vole). But our correspondent's sketch of the nest showed that she had discovered the home of the rare and shy Harvest-Mouse—*Mus minutus*.

I suspect that few readers have ever discovered for themselves this miracle of animal architecture. The sketch well brings out two points to be observed when one has the fortune to find the nest as woven among the stems of standing corn, and to see the little owners. The round cradle is built of corn-leaves which the Mice have gathered and partially split, but a few growing leaves may be woven into the structure. Then the sketch brings out the unique feature of the Harvest-Mouse, its prehensile or clinging tail, curling round a cornstalk as the little animal climbs to its lair. We have no other mammal with a tail used quite in this way.

Had our observer realized what a fortunate find she had made, she would have felt as stout Cortez did when he discovered the Pacific Ocean. A naturalist made the same discovery of the nest a hundred and sixty odd years ago, and when he gave the world the first published account of the Mouse and its nest, he was hailed as having discovered a new British species of mammal. The naturalist was Gilbert White of Selborne, but he was not so fortunate as our observer in seeing a typical nest of the Mouse, for the specimen brought to him had been suspended in a Thistle head. He described it as " most artificially plaited, and composed of the blades of wheat—perfectly round, and about the size of a cricket-ball, with the aperture so ingeniously closed, that there was no discovering to what part it belonged. It was so compact and well filled, that it would roll across the table without being discomposed, though it contained eight little mice that were naked and blind."

The Fly and the Dragon

Who named Dragonflies ? The name is a just one, judging by this story :

" I was sitting in a Sussex garden watching butterflies,

when a beautiful Dragonfly settled on my knee. Exquisitely veined and transparent wings were outspread on either side of the velvety body. I observed the little black head, the bright eyes, the long hairy legs, and the tiny jaws—which held a House-fly, desperately struggling. But the Dragonfly crumpled it into a ball and swallowed it, and then, with

a shake of its long flame-coloured body and a quivering of its iridescent wings, soared into the air to join a lover."

A Blackbird's Good Turn

A little story :

A Blackbird was warbling in an apple-tree. A cat was washing her face on a doorstep. A Sparrow was feeding its

young in a nest on the house. Presently the Sparrow spied a fat green caterpillar on a rose-bush. Down flew the Sparrow for its prey. The cat finished her toilet; then quietly slipped behind a convenient log of wood, and, prowling on her stomach, hiding among the flowers, stalked the innocent Sparrow. A Blackbird saw her sinister form and instantly gave the alarm, whereupon away flew the

Sparrow, forgetting its caterpillar, and puss returned beaten. Thus the Blackbird saved the life of a feathered friend—and of a caterpillar.

The cat, too, can do a good turn; for we know a cat which continually brings indoors live birds, carrying them carefully in her mouth to an upstairs sitting-room, never hurting them, so that they fly away immediately on being released. She knows her mistress is fond of birds, and having

brought one in for inspection is very proud of herself and purrs loudly.

The story of the Blackbird's good turn brought a story of a good turn done by a poor London woman, an office cleaner, to a cat, during the Great Strike of 1926. Three kittens had been born in a waste-paper basket in the office of the *Daily Express* newspaper. There was none to look after them in the terrible days of the strike ; but the noble-hearted office-cleaner made it her duty to walk from her home at Peckham to the office at Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, London, during those days of disorganized traffic, to feed the mother cat ; but for her, cat and kittens must have starved.

I repeat this story mainly because it interested me, personally, for a particular reason. I know that waste-paper basket in that office. The birth-place of the kittens has been the grave of many a pretty child of my fancy.

. . . . . .

A child of tender years sent a story to our Log on the courting habits of the Robin, a story suggesting that Robin is a fickle lover.

" From what I have seen of the cock Robin courting, he sat on a bush and sang to the hen, then danced about in front of her, cocked up his tail, presented her with something, *flew after another Robin*, and disappeared ! "

CHAPTER XI

THE RED MOON

" Come wander with me," she said,
" Into regions yet untrod,
And read what is still unread,
In the manuscripts of God."

THOUGH now we may ask with the poet,

Where is the pride of Summer—the green prime,
The many, many leaves all twinkling ?

and answer with him,

Three
On the mossed Elm—three on the naked Lime,
Trembling—and one upon the old Oak-tree

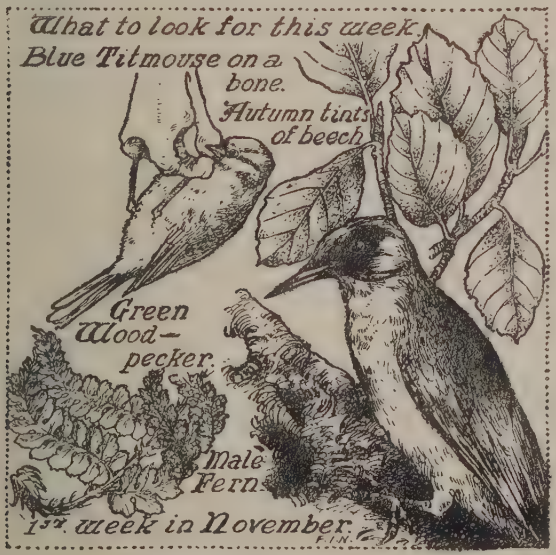
it is a comforting thought, that Autumn sees the beginning of Nature's year. Summer has gone on the Swallow's wings. We see the old year dying, which some hold to be a sad sight. Yet as the leaves fall we observe that it is the new young shoots which dethrone them. Youth must be served. Wherever the leaf-stem is broken there is a fresh bud ; black buds on the Ash (" More black than Ash-buds in the front of March "), brown-pointed needles on the Beech, deep brown buds on the Chestnut, purple ones on the Alder, grey and silky ones on the Poplar, and downy ones on Willows and Sallows, dreaming of a day when the call of the Mistle-Thrush shall ring up *our* New Year's curtain.

Examining any tree, we observe the exquisite arrange-

ments for the preservation of the bud, which seem to confirm the exclamation of the poet,

Each leaf and bud
Doth know I AM.

Consider a bud of a Plane. By a curious and beautiful arrangement, differing from those of our other trees, until



the leaf falls the tender young bud is enclosed in the leaf's hollow case, which protects it from all injury. The bud is about half an inch high, thick and conical, and is wrapped in a brown scale, its overcoat, the interior of which is covered with a gummy secretion. Within are other scales. There is a second cap, with a few hairs, and black dots which are glands; once again we notice the sticky secretion. A third cap has silky hairs; a fourth is open at the top, like a collar,

and at its base is a little oval leaf ; there are yet two more scales, smaller but similar : these scales being in fact stipules. Each cap-like scale is broken in turn as the bud develops. Within the buds are the neatly-rolled leaves, so rolled as to display the upper surfaces. No human baby is better protected from winter cold than the Plane's bud. As the scales are broken by the bud's growth, the outer ones fall off, but others connected with the leaf stay for a time. Early in April one sees on the ground beneath a Plane thousands of the buds' garments which Nature had pulled away. Many of the buds seen in November contain a mass of flower-buds.

Touches of colour glow in the hedges, where Greenfinches feast among the scarlet Haws, or where Bryony trails festoons of gay berries. The wind scatters the feathered seeds of Old Man's Beard. A few flowers linger on—Mullein, a Foxglove or two, Campion, Scarlet Pimpernel, telling of sunny hours, Groundsel, and Red Dead-Nettle ; and a few Primroses may be found.

With the falling of the leaves the tree-haunting birds come more into view ; and our artist's eye was rewarded this month by a good view of a Spotted Woodpecker. The midget Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, some five inches long, is rarely seen in summer, since it haunts the tops of high trees, and is lost in the leaves. The Great Spotted Woodpecker is larger than a Thrush—some nine and a half inches long. To see either of these birds for a moment, as it comes to rest on a tree-trunk, is to receive a vivid impression of the colours, the crimson patches on the head, and the pied black and white plumage. We must note that the grown female of the Great Spotted species has no crimson on the head, while the young of both sexes have the whole crown of that colour. The male, beside his crimson patch on his head, has a crimson abdomen and under tail-coverts. The whole crown of the male of the lesser species is bright red.

The bird has a liking for tall trees with decaying or dead branches.

The Moons of the Year

We named this month, the Red Moon, thinking the name suggested the sunset of the year. This idea of re-naming the

months we took from the Eskimos, " children of twilight " (since the sun never rises for months in Eskimo-land in winter), a people of small stature, copper-coloured, and clad in the skins of the animals they hunt—Seal, Walrus, Polar Bear, Whale, Fox, Arctic Hare, Caribou, and Wolf, who, by their primitive habits, take us back through history, thousands of years, to the Stone Age. They divide the year into thirteen months of twenty-eight days each, according to

the moons, and each month has its name. *Kah-pid-rah* is the name of the January moon, meaning, " It is cold." Other moons are named, " The sun returns " ; " the sun is rising " ; " the baby Seals arrive " ; " the Seals take to the water " ; " the Seals shed their coats " ; " the Caribou young are born " ; " the birds are nesting " ; " the young birds are hatched " ; " the Caribou migrate " ; " the time to have a wife " ; "the ice is making in the bays " ; " the sun disappears."

These descriptions of the seasons are akin to the Saxon names for our months, such as Wolf-month for January ; Sprout-kele, or Cabbage-month, for February ; Wind-month, for March ; and Mede, or Meadow-month—the month when meadows are pleasant—for June.

We were told that North-American Indians have such names for the months as Snow Moon, and Crow, Grass, Planting, Rose, Thunder, Red, Hunting, Leaf-Falling, Mad, and Long-night Moons.

The titles to the chapters of this book give some of the names we thought appropriate for our English moons, though we thought of many others. Thus, January might be either the Snow moon, or the Cold, the Frost, the Ice, the Dark, or the Fireside Moon. February is St. Valentine's —or the Fill-dyke, the Flood, the Greening, or the Waking Moon. We thought we could not better the title, the Roaring Moon for March, but for April we were divided between many titles, like the Proud Pied Moon, the Daffodil, the Cuckoo, the Swallow, the Rainbow, the Shine-and-Shower, the Bud, and the Cry-Baby Moon. May we thought might be the Flower or else the Bird Moon. June is Leafy June ; July is the Golden Moon, also the Camp Fire Moon. August we might have named the Reaping Moon, or some thought the Silver Sea Moon would be a name to conjure happy thoughts. September might be the Mist, the Hunter's, the Gossamer, the Gold Leaf, the Fruitful, or the Robin

Moon. October might be the Berry, the Sunset, or the Dying Glory Moon; November, the Silent, or the Dead Moon; and December—if you please—the Goodwill Moon.

A year, we decided, should be called "From Snow to Snow."

November is the Silent Moon and the Dead Moon, but

there is always the music of Robin to cheer the dark way, and even the little Goldcrests, which come to us in multitudes this Moon from across the North Sea, on their fairy wings, contribute something to our cheer if the sun happens to glint on their burnished crests. The reward of walking in woods in November is many a sudden burst of song, and many a swift vision of light and colour. This note in our winter Log caught one vivid impression of a scene suggesting

at once decay and death, and the overflowing joy of life :

" A Burdock stood forlorn in the yard of a workshop ; its best days had gone but—who knows ?—it may have been dreaming of a golden minute yet to be. People pitied it, so miserable it looked—so dead. Yet something *was* in store for that Burdock—for all of a sudden five Goldfinches flew over the yard's wall, and settled on its withered branches, and for one minute the seven-coloured birds, with their crimson caps, and gold-barred wings, and with their silver love-talk, touched the dead plant with their own loveliness."

The Love of Animals

I now have a tale to tell which illustrates the peculiar and heaven-sent power exercised by some mortals in soothing savage breasts. It is the story of the taming of a Weasel : one of the most wonderful and beautiful stories I have ever heard.

Most of us regard our little Weasel as a duodecimo Tiger. In his lithe, slender, snake-like body, we seem to see the concentrated essence of the savagery of all beasts of prey. From his youth upwards the little Weasel is fed on blood, and blood-thirsty he remains through life, the pattern of a crafty and a mighty hunter. Naturalists have pointed out that as the Weasel is the most ferocious, so he is the most successful of his tribe, and lives on through much the same bitter persecution which has exterminated the larger, stronger Polecat. His small size has been in his favour. Some specimens are scarcely larger than the mice on which they prey, and will slip magically from view underground, in runs of mice or moles. It is sometimes said that for his size the Weasel is the fiercest animal in the world. Yet our correspondent, a " gentle woman," tamed him, and made him her dear pet and companion. She shows a new side

of his character, a docile side—playful, intelligent, amusing, and entirely charming.

Under the soothing touch of her hand he showed no savagery, except when feeding-time came; then, indeed, at the sight of blood in raw meat, all his fierce instincts were asserted. Possibly if a diet less enraging had been found to suit him, his table manners might have been better.

Our Weasel-charmer must have much of the compassion and the power by which St. Francis of Assisi won the love of wild creatures; he who would call the birds "my little sisters," and would gather them round him while he preached. Saints with his power are here among us to-day, people of infinite compassion and mercy for wild creatures. In their quiet and gentle presence, the savage nature is calmed by the sort of holy peace we feel on entering a

wood on an April evening. The vicious Weasel curls to sleep in their hands.

Hear the yarn of

My Tame Weasel.

A Weasel ran out of the long grass and over a cart-track on the Downs. She carried her small son in her mouth, but he was rather heavy, and a wilful child, almost too much for her to manage. So when she saw me she dropped him into a rut, and vanished. Perhaps he had been told to follow, but he could not climb out of the rut. Perhaps he was told to wait until she ventured back for him, but though I waited for some time she did not come, and at last I rescued him myself, and took him home.

He was friendly to me from the first, nestling in my hand, quite fearless, and ready to follow me from the moment I put him down on the floor. He was only about six inches long from his nose of palest pink to the tip of his stubby tail, but he would come after me up the staircase, crying in his agitation and excitement till he found a foothold up each step. Very unhappy if left alone, he liked to sleep in my hand, or on my lap. If I were sitting sewing or reading, he would be beside me, rolling over and over on a ball of wool, or chasing my thimble. When I left him alone upon a chair, as he was too small to climb down by himself, he would run up and down growling, with his sharp white teeth bared, and no one dared to touch him. But he knew my voice, and came to me at once. The only time he ever doubted me was when I had washed my hands with scented soap ; then he would hesitate before he rushed up my skirt and into my hand, where he would roll over and over like a little ball.

He was very curious, very daring, always restless when awake, and running here and there looking into everything,

smelling or tasting everything that came his way. He could never settle in a room until he had explored every inch. If I should open a drawer or desk he would be inside in a flash, and possibly would be left behind. He slept at night in a box in my room, and when it was opened in the morning he was out in a second, and across the room to where my hand was waiting for him on the floor, up my arm, and into bed, where he curled up like a little ball, and went to sleep again.

I fed him chiefly on raw meat. He became then a little savage beast, tearing, snarling, fighting. His meal over, he came out again to play, a shamefaced look upon his face, I used to think, as if he hardly understood why he had shown such savagery. All his endearing ways returned; he was charming and utterly delightful.

CHAPTER XII

The Yule Moon

Then, heigh ho, the Holly !
This life is most jolly !

THOSE lines give us, I think, Shakespeare's one reference to the Holly, a tree of which we may be proud, for though it is a native of Central Europe and Western Asia, this country produces finer trees than any other. At their tallest, Hollies reach to eighty feet in height, and have a diameter of four to five feet.

Botanically, the tree is of deep interest. The fine evergreen leaves, which are spirally arranged, are so tough that they endure for several years. The lower ones are prickly, but the upper ones are often without spines, with a difference in shape comparable to that seen in the lower and upper Ivy leaves. The small, whitish flowers appear in May or later, in clusters, in the axils of the leaves of the year before, and they may be male flowers, female or bisexual ; one tree may have male flowers (therefore never bearing berries), another female, or individuals may bear the three kinds. Nectar, at the base of the creamy petals, attracts insects, the agents of pollination. The red fruit is, botanically, not a berry, but a stone-fruit, and ripens about September. It appears to be somewhat too acrid to be enjoyed by most birds, but is taken, after being mellowed by frost, by birds of the Thrush tribe.

The caterpillar of the Holly Blue Butterfly feeds on the flowers in spring.

The glossy leaves reflect the sun like mirrors, and the coral berries are especially cheerful on a winter's morn among the dead brakes in woods: as the poet Southey sang:

> When the bare and wintry woods we see,
> What then so cheerful as the Holly tree?

The old name for Holly was Holy-tree, from its decorative service at the holy time of Christmas. The German name is "Christdorn." Through all ages, from the time of the Druids, Holly has been the emblem of good wishes.

Festal carols used to be chanted in old England in praise of Holly at Christmas: here is one quaint specimen, warning all men to say nothing evil against the Holy-tree:

Here comes Holly that is so gent,
To please all men is his intent.
Allelujah!
Whosoever against Holly do cry,
In a rope shall be hung high.
Allelujah!
Whosoever against Holly do sing,
He may weep and his hands wring.
Allelujah!

When we steal a kiss under the Mistletoe, perhaps we do not stop to think of a Grey Thrush which, on a spring day, sowed the seeds whence sprang the spray over our head. The Mistle or Mistletoe-Thrush is named from his liking for Mistletoe berries, and after feasting thereon it is likely to wipe its beak on a branch. The berries are sticky and cling to the bird's beak, and as the remains are wiped away, a seed may be set on the branch, and there take growth. A certain pair of Mistle-Thrushes of my close acquaintance lived up to their name last spring by building their nest in a spray of Mistletoe. To cultivate this parasite of a plant, a ripe berry should be taken in spring, and crushed so that the seed is pressed out, and this should then be pressed into a crack of a tree-branch, on the underside, so that rain shall not wash it away. If it prospers, in about four years it should be a bushy mass. The roots of Mistletoe are so strong that they will penetrate sheer into the heart of a tree. The name Mistletoe is traced to the Anglo-Saxon *mistle*, different, and *tan*, twig, suggesting its parasitic nature, and its difference from the tree which is its support.

The poet Herrick saw in the Mistletoe a beautiful emblem of his dependence on the care of Providence:

Lord, I am like the Mistletoe,
Which has no root and cannot grow,
Or prosper, save by that same tree
It clings about; so I by Thee.

Our artist gave some bright touches to our Log this

month by introducing the scarlet berries of Stinking Iris; a little red fungus which children call "fairies' slippers" (*Nectria cinnabarina*), very cheerful on a dull day; Yew-berries also, on which a Blackbird was feeding; winter buds of Hazel; Alder catkins; the scarlet urns of Hips, which feed Field-mice as well as birds; and a Mallard in courting costume; and sent our thoughts to Christmas

with studies of Christmas Roses, and a Robin seated in a Holly.

The plant called so bluntly Stinking Iris grows wild in Devon woods and elsewhere, and scarcely deserves its name unless a leaf be crushed, when its odour is certainly powerful—otherwise the scent is somewhat like roast beef, agreeable or not according to taste. It flowers from June to August. The leaves are so bitter as to produce a burning on

the tongue, and were highly esteemed by the old herbalists. The many round seeds make a brave show in winter, and are attractive to slugs, snails, and mice.

What would Christmas be if the postman did not bring us a Christmas-card showing a Redbreast with its little feet wide apart on a spray of Holly, looking at a church set in a scene of frosted snow? I almost feel that something is lacking from a Christmas morning service if I do not see the Redbreast's dapper form among the congregation—so often have I known him to come to church on Christmas Day, and join in the anthems. We may recall the legend of his red breast:

"Far, far away is a land of woe, darkness, spirits of evil and fire. Day by day does this dear little bird bear in its bill a drop of water to quench its flames. So near the burning stream does he fly, that his dear little feathers are scorched, and hence he is called (in Wales) *Bron-rhuddyn*, or Breast-burnt. To serve little children the Redbreast dares approach the infernal pit, so no child of proper feeling will hurt this devoted benefactor of man. But the Redbreast returns from the land of fire, and, therefore, feels the cold of winter more than his brother birds, and in consequence deserves and claims man's especial protection."

No child of "proper feeling" will harm him; rather, having a proper feeling for this devoted benefactor of mankind, will remember that the Redbreast enjoys good things to eat at Christmas as much as anyone, and so will add a little butter to his crust of bread, and spare him a slice of Christmas cake.

Some other birds of Christmas might wish they were less closely associated with the feast, like Turkeys and Geese. The ancestor of the farmyard Turkey was the American Wild Turkey, a bird which would have served better than the Eagle as the emblem of the Americans, for it was their national bird—now gone the way of the Indian

and the Buffalo. To pioneer colonists the Turkey meant as much as the barndoor rooster to the English farmer, and was also " the bird of dawning " ; at daybreak, the whole country would ring for an hour with the universal shout of the Turkeys' watch-words. The Spaniards brought us the Christmas Turkey, which reached our shores early in the sixteenth century, and soon became the usual fare of the

farmer's table at Christmas. The name, Turkey, has nothing to do with Turkey or the Turks ; it was originally applied to Guinea-fowl, but gradually stuck to the Turkey, no doubt because of the sound of its call, " Turk, turk ! "— whereby it may be said to have named itself, like the Cuckoo.

The Christmas Goose is a descendant of the wild Grey-lag Goose, which earned its name by its habit of lagging behind after other Geese have flown from our country to their nest-

ing-grounds in the north. There is another possible origin of the name, Lag-goose. In Lincolnshire, when a gozzard drives a flock of Geese, he urges it on with the cry " Lag 'em, lag 'em ! " or he did so in the old days, when the flocks would be driven to market, travelling about ten miles a day. Many a farmer in Lincolnshire of Early Victorian days would own a thousand Geese, each reckoned to rear seven Goslings in a season. Lincolnshire was then the great nursery of the Geese which supplied our fathers with goose-quill pens. At every quarter the pen-feathers would be pulled out, five from each wing, the market price standing as low as five shillings a thousand ; the profit from the pen-feathers of one bird would not be more than threepence in a year.

The wild Geese are a little smaller than the Christmas birds we know best, but the tame ones have much in common with their wild kindred. Perhaps no creature has been tamed so long as the Goose, and has kept more true to ancestral type. The barnyard Goose is as vigilant as the wild bird, and will raise the alarm before the Watch-dog is awake. One of the oldest pictures in the world, a fresco dated 3000 B.C., shows ancient Egyptians cramming their Geese for sacrifice.

The Cat that Kept Christmas

Here is a plain, unvarnished Christmas yarn, which came to us from an invalid's sick-bed :

" Last year on Christmas morning my cat, Chummy, lay on my bed whilst I opened my presents. For a time, he played with the coloured string and crinkly papers that lay on the floor. Soon he ' meowed ' till we let him out. Some time later Chummy came rushing upstairs into my room, looking ever so delighted—he came to my bedside frisking and jumping, then ran to the door, to return proudly carrying

a dead bird. He sprang into my bed and laid the bird before me. I was quite horrified; he had never been known to kill a bird before. I scolded him, and he went out looking very crestfallen.

"About half an hour afterwards he came in, once more carrying something, which, this time, he laid at the side of my bed—a Mouse! I did not know what to say to this!

He was so pleased with the Christmas present he had brought, that he kept rubbing my hand with his head and purring, as if to say, 'I hope you like this!' Did he really know that it was not an ordinary day, and, jealous of my gifts, thought he could give me something too? and, when his feathered offering did not please, did he deliberately go to bring me his favourite catch? Anyhow, Chummy was the hero of that Christmas day."

The Sparrow and the Tortoise

A note came to our Log this month about a Sparrow which has lost, for the time being, a devoted friend in the remarkable form of a Tortoise—for the Tortoise has buried himself in the soil of a garden bed for his winter sleep. The Sparrow is a cripple, lame in one leg, and perhaps in consequence may be despised by other Sparrows, so that he finds consolation in the Tortoise's company, when the Tortoise walks in the garden by day, and, in summer, sleeps in a wash-house at night. Whenever food is carried out to the Tortoise, the Sparrow appears, and expects to be regaled on bread-crumbs, which he takes from the same dish as that from which his friend is eating. Evening drawing on, the Tortoise and the Sparrow repair during the summer to the wash-house door, waiting until it is time for the door to be opened, and to go to bed. And then the two friends sleep, we were told, "side by side, cuddled up closely in loving companionship." One would think a Tortoise would be a chilly bed-fellow!

How to Feed a Fairy

This Moon the following letter reached our Log-Book keeper:

"Would fairies come into your Log? If so, may I tell you about *my* fairy? A cat caught her, and broke her leg. Nurse took her from the cat, and brought her to me, knowing that I love fairies and love to have a hospital.

"She is so small that when I hold her in my hand I do not feel that anything is there. Her eyes are the smallest and brightest I have ever seen. She has a quaint way of turning her head, and looking up into my eyes.

"When Nurse brought her to me, she was lying on her back on a piece of cotton-wool. She showed no fear.

At first I had to put her food—bread-crumbs and eggs—into her mouth; now she takes dainty pieces eagerly from my hand. (Did you know that fairies eat?) When she is thirsty, one drop of rain-water is all she takes. One day she escaped from my hand, and flew round and round my room. I was frightened, because of her broken leg, but she fell at last onto my eiderdown, and did not seem to suffer.

"Her voice is sweetly imperious, but this is as it should be, for she wears a golden crown.

"My fairy is a Goldcrest."

Merry-go-Round Again

The December calendar is largely a record of sleep. Winter, the hypnotist, has waved his wand, and sent all Adders and Snakes to sleep in their holes, Bats among rafters in barns, Frogs, Toads, and some Fishes in the pond's mud, the Snail in his shell, the Dormouse in his winter nest, the Hedgehog in the leafy ditch. Gilbert White of Selborne found but nine notes for his December Nature-log, and seven were about flowers, Daisy, Wall-flower, Mezereon, Snowdrop, Stinking Hellebore, Polyanthus, and Furze. He remarked how Moles work in throwing up hillocks, and proclaimed how a new generation of animals were gladdening the fields where the early Lambs were at play. So the end of the year's calendar merges into the beginning. Merry-go-round—and merry-go-round again!

January is named from the heathen two-headed god Janus who looked backward as well as forward, and on New Year's Eve we may be inclined to look backward; but it is better to look forward:

> We live by hope
> And by desire; we see by the glad light
> And breathe the sweet air of futurity;
> And so we live, or else we have no life.

What to look for this week.
5th. week in December
F.I.N.

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